

China takes on the world ¹⁵

The battle of Portland ³⁰

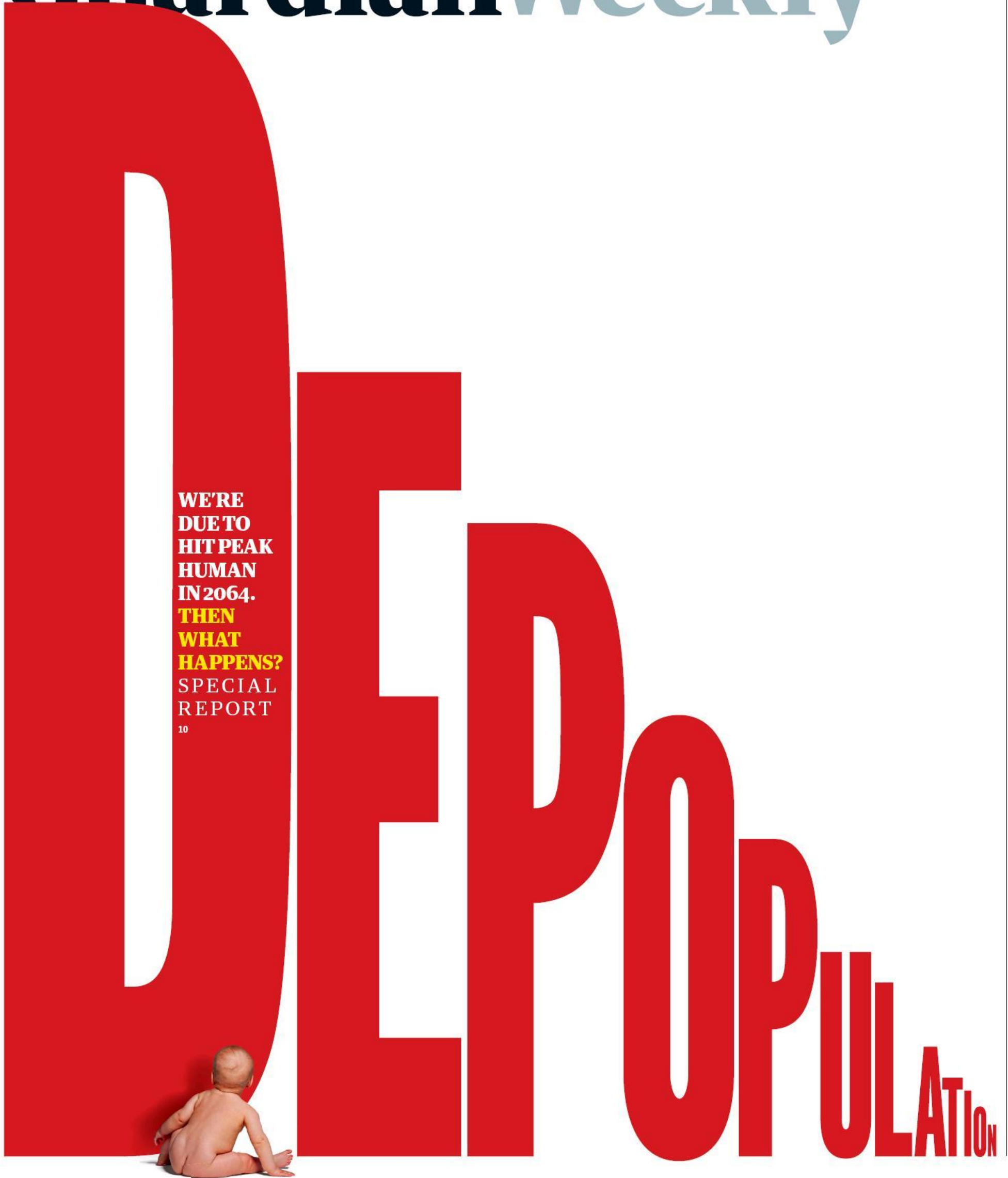
Boris Johnson's wild first year ²⁰

A week in the life of the world | *Global edition*
31 JULY 2020 | VOL.203 No.7 | £4.50 | €6.95*

The Guardian Weekly

WE'RE
DUE TO
HIT PEAK
HUMAN
IN 2064.
**THEN
WHAT
HAPPENS?**
SPECIAL
REPORT

10



*Exclusions apply

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VISIT...

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Eyewitness North America

PHOTOGRAPH:
CARLOS OSORIO/REUTERS

📍 A tale of two countries

American tourist boat Maid of the Mist, limited to 50% occupancy under New York state's rules amid the spread of the coronavirus, glides past a Canadian vessel limited under Ontario's rules to just six passengers, at Niagara Falls on the US/Canadian border. [Spotlight coronavirus page 18 →](#)



The Guardian Weekly
Founded in Manchester,
England
4 July 1919

Vol 203 | Issue No 7

Guardian Weekly is an edited selection of some of the best journalism found in the Guardian and Observer newspapers in the UK and the Guardian's digital editions in the UK, US and Australia.

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A shrinking planet; US street battles and the wildfire aftermath

An exponentially rising global population is a major threat to the planet's sustainability. But what happens if, as a new study suggests, we will hit peak human in 2064? Can society cope with an ageing population? And what is the cause of slowing birthrates around the world? Michael Safi investigates on page 10, while Guardian books writer Sian Cain explains why she, as a young environmentalist, has taken the difficult decision to remain child-free.

The big story: peak human [page 10](#) →

With spikes in Belgium, Spain, France and Germany, Europe is bracing itself for a second wave of coronavirus.

Countries across the continent are adjusting their restrictions, including the UK, which imposed a 14-day quarantine rule on people returning from Spain, spreading panic across both nations' tourist industries. On page 18, our team of European correspondents look at the latest developments. **Spotlight Europe** [page 18](#) →

In Portland, Oregon, the protests that began with the death of George Floyd in Minnesota have turned into a nightly face-off between protesters and federal agents.

The move to send forces into big American cities, explains Tom McCarthy, is part of Donald Trump's attempts to fuel "law and order" concerns ahead of November's US election. After a similar gambit failed in the 2018 midterms, could this one work? **Spotlight US** [page 30](#) →

In Australia's dark summer of 2019-20, wildfires killed or displaced nearly 3 billion animals and destroyed landscapes and lives. Transport across Australian state lines is currently restricted due to Covid-19, but Guardian Australia environmental reporter Graham Readfearn took a virtual trip across the nation to discover, six months on, the impact on a charred landscape.

The aftermath [page 34](#) →



On the cover

Depopulation – plummeting birth rates mean a changed world. Researchers may disagree on when precisely but, as Michael Safi reports, it's agreed that within decades a falling population – fuelled by female emancipation – could radically alter societies, economies and the balance of global power.

Photograph: Tripod/Getty Images



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MATT BLEASE

Global report

Headlines from the last seven days

1 EUROPE

Holidaymakers face new restrictions on return home

The decision to impose a mandatory 14-day quarantine on travellers entering the UK from Spain and to warn Britons against travelling to the country is an error based on incorrect epidemiological reasoning, the prime minister of Spain, Pedro Sánchez, said.

Speaking on Spanish television on Monday night, he said much of his country, where Britons usually comprise a fifth of foreign visitors, had a lower infection rate than the UK. The rebound in coronavirus cases is focused in two regions, Catalonia and Aragon, he said, adding: "In most of Spain, the incidence [of the disease] is very much inferior to even the numbers registered in the United Kingdom."

Germany is to introduce obligatory testing for all travellers returning from regions considered to be high risk, its health minister has said. Jens Spahn said he would introduce mandatory testing as soon as the legislation was in place. The move has broad cross-party support amid a rise in coronavirus rates in the country, which have been at least in part put down to hundreds of thousands of Germans returning from holidays.

Europe braces again page 18 →



2 GERMANY



Nation tops annual poll of most admired countries

Germany is the most admired country in the world for the third year running, leaving the US in a tight battle for distant second place with China and Russia, according to a new global leadership poll.

The annual poll, conducted by Gallup, casts more doubt on US secretary of state Mike Pompeo's claim on 24 July that the US was "perfectly positioned" to lead the free world in a new ideological rivalry with the Chinese Communist party.

The US had a 33% global approval rating for 2019, just one percentage point ahead of China and 3% ahead of Russia. Germany outshines all three by a long stretch, with a 44% rating.

Analysis: 'America first' and the US's anti-China alliance page 17 →

4 HUNGARY

Mass resignation at last big independent media outlet

The editorial board and the majority of journalists at the country's biggest independent news outlet resigned after its editor-in-chief was fired amid claims of political interference.

More than 70 of roughly 90 editorial staff at index.hu walked out of the newsroom last Friday after submitting their resignations in the wake of Szabolcs Dull's dismissal last week.

The departing journalists published an open letter on the outlet's website in Hungarian and English. "The editorial board deemed that the conditions for independent operation are no longer in place and have initiated the termination of their employment," it said.

Index was considered the last major independent outlet in Hungary, which is ranked the second-worst country in the EU for media freedom by Reporters Without Borders. During the past decade of rule by the far-right prime minister, Viktor Orbán, the media landscape has gradually contracted, as outlets were bought out by pro-government figures or closed down.

3 BRAZIL

Wildlife trafficking threat revealed in new report

Millions of wild animals are trafficked within and out of Brazil every year, a new report has found, with its authors warning that a lack of good quality data means the country's illegal wildlife trade is not taken seriously enough.

"The information is very dispersed," said the lead author, Sandra Charity, a biodiversity consultant who wrote the 140-page study with Juliana Ferreira from NGO Freeland Brasil. Produced by wildlife trade monitoring network Traffic, it called for a national strategy to combat the lucrative business.

5 BUSINESS

Apple pledges to become carbon-neutral by 2030

Apple pledged to become a carbon-neutral operation by 2030, a commitment that covers its entire supply chain and the lifecycle of all products, including the electricity consumed in their use. The majority of the progress, Apple says in its 2020 environmental progress report, will be made by cutting its carbon emissions directly. But the last 25% will come from "carbon removal solutions" such as forest planting and mangrove swamp restoration.

In January, Microsoft announced a plan to become carbon-negative by 2030.

GW

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Published weekly by Guardian News & Media Ltd, Kings Place, 90 York Way, London, N1 9GU, UK

Printed by Wyndeham Group, Bicester

Registered as a newspaper at the Post Office

ISSN 0958-9996

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6 WEALTH

Jeff Bezos and Amazon record Covid-19 winners

Jeff Bezos set a fresh record by increasing his fortune by an additional \$13bn in a single day to take his personal wealth to an unprecedented \$189bn.

The huge increase in Bezos's wealth on 20 July is equivalent to adding nearly 30 times Queen Elizabeth II's fortune, estimated at \$450m.

Bezos's fortune has been swelled by Amazon's soaraway share price as hundreds of millions of people trapped at home by coronavirus lockdowns around the world turn to the online delivery giant to keep themselves fed and entertained.

8 POLAND

Government to withdraw from women's rights treaty

The government's move to withdraw from an international treaty aimed at preventing violence against women raised alarm in the Council of Europe. Justice minister Zbigniew Ziobro said on 25 July that he would begin preparing the formal process to withdraw from the Istanbul convention. The treaty is the world's first binding instrument to prevent and tackle violence against women.

10 GERMANY



Former Nazi guard found guilty over 5,232 murders

A 93-year-old former SS guard was found guilty of accessory to the murder of 5,232 people at a Nazi concentration camp in the final days of the second world war.

Bruno Dey, who was 17 when he joined Stutthof concentration camp as a guard, was handed a two-year suspended sentence by a youth court in Hamburg on 23 July. "The concentration camp Stutthof and the mass murder that took place inside was only able to take place with your help," said the judge Anne Meier-Görling in her verdict.

7 MEXICO



Amlo cuts women's aid in face of increase in violence

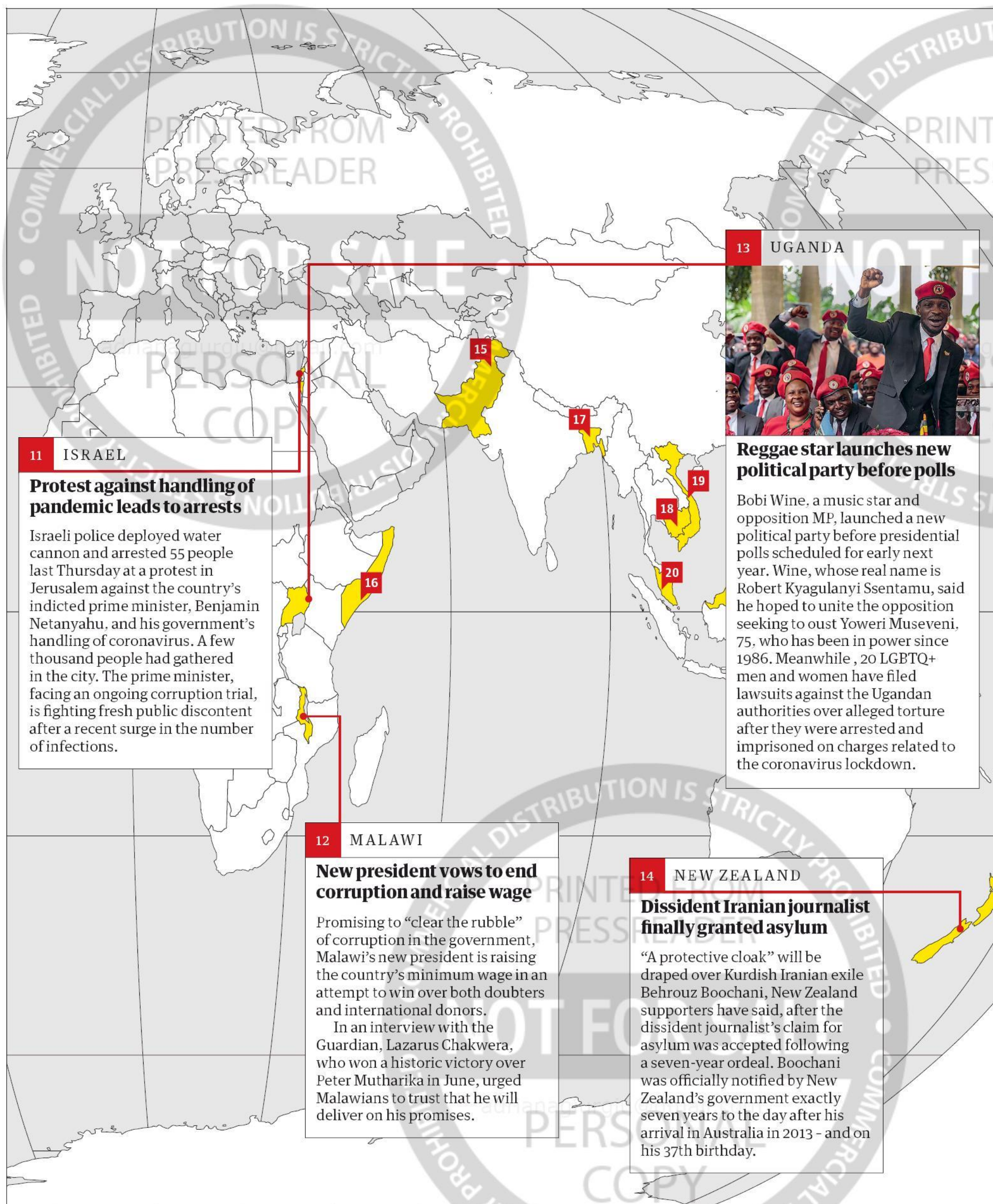
Violence against women has surged since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, but president Andrés Manuel López Obrador has downplayed the problem and slashed the budgets of agencies charged with addressing women's issues. New figures show that crimes such as femicide climbed 7.7% in the first half of 2020, when compared with the same period last year, and shelters have reported a sharp rise in the number of women attempting to flee domestic violence.

This month the government approved a 75% budget cut for the federal women's institute.

9 BOLIVIA

September election in doubt as C-19 takes its toll

Planned elections in September are in doubt amid rising coronavirus deaths, and reports that police have recovered the bodies of hundreds of suspected Covid-19 victims. Elections scheduled for September were seen as a key step in stabilising democracy after a year of political tumult that reached its peak in November when Evo Morales was ousted by the military.



11 ISRAEL

Protest against handling of pandemic leads to arrests

Israeli police deployed water cannon and arrested 55 people last Thursday at a protest in Jerusalem against the country's indicted prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, and his government's handling of coronavirus. A few thousand people had gathered in the city. The prime minister, facing an ongoing corruption trial, is fighting fresh public discontent after a recent surge in the number of infections.

12 MALAWI

New president vows to end corruption and raise wage

Promising to "clear the rubble" of corruption in the government, Malawi's new president is raising the country's minimum wage in an attempt to win over both doubters and international donors.

In an interview with the Guardian, Lazarus Chakwera, who won a historic victory over Peter Mutharika in June, urged Malawians to trust that he will deliver on his promises.

13 UGANDA



Reggae star launches new political party before polls

Bobi Wine, a music star and opposition MP, launched a new political party before presidential polls scheduled for early next year. Wine, whose real name is Robert Kyagulanyi Ssentamu, said he hoped to unite the opposition seeking to oust Yoweri Museveni, 75, who has been in power since 1986. Meanwhile, 20 LGBTQ+ men and women have filed lawsuits against the Ugandan authorities over alleged torture after they were arrested and imprisoned on charges related to the coronavirus lockdown.

14 NEW ZEALAND

Dissident Iranian journalist finally granted asylum

"A protective cloak" will be draped over Kurdish Iranian exile Behrouz Boochani, New Zealand supporters have said, after the dissident journalist's claim for asylum was accepted following a seven-year ordeal. Boochani was officially notified by New Zealand's government exactly seven years to the day after his arrival in Australia in 2013 - and on his 37th birthday.

15 PAKISTAN



But last Tuesday night Abbasi said his brother had been released.

16 SOMALIA

Prime minister removed after vote of no confidence

A resounding 170 of parliament's 178 MPs backed the no-confidence motion, and Khaire's ouster was endorsed by the president, Mohamed Abdullahi Farmajo, who had appointed him as prime minister in February 2017. The deputies had arrived at the national assembly to work on the organisation of the next national elections in 2021.

17 BANGLADESH

Monsoon flooding adds to super-cyclone's damage

Meanwhile, Malaysian authorities have launched a search for 24 Rohingya refugees who went missing while trying to swim to shore from a boat off the resort island of Langkawi. Muslim-majority Malaysia has long been a favoured destination for Rohingya Muslims seeking a better life after escaping the 2017 military crackdown in Myanmar.

18 CAMBODIA

Wetlands destroyed to make way for development

The Tompoun/Cheung Ek wetlands play a vital role in the Cambodian capital, acting as a natural store of 70% of its rain and providing livelihoods for more than 1,000 families. But a report says that in 2004 developers began to destroy the wetlands, filling them to prepare for building a huge satellite city.

19 VIETNAM

Danang evacuated after new coronavirus cases

Spotlight Covid-19, page 18 →



Former PM guilty on all counts in 1MDB scandal

On 24 July, Goldman Sachs reached a \$3.9bn settlement with the Malaysian government over the scandal involving the bank's alleged failure to act over the case.

DEATHS



Kansai

Peter Green

Paulette Wilson

Peter Graham

Writer about French food and long-time translator of *Le Monde* articles for the Guardian Weekly. He died on 8 July, aged 80.



CLIMATE CRISIS

Methane leak from sea floor sparks global warming worry

The first active leak of methane from the sea floor in Antarctica has been revealed by scientists.

The researchers also found microbes that normally consume the potent greenhouse gas before it reaches the atmosphere had only arrived in small numbers after five years, allowing the gas to escape.

Vast quantities of methane are thought to be stored under the sea floor around Antarctica. The gas could start to leak as the climate crisis warms the oceans.

"The delay [in methane consumption] is the most important finding," said Andrew Thurber, from Oregon State University in the US, who led the research. "It is not good news. It took more than five years for the microbes to begin to show up and even then there was still methane rapidly escaping from the sea floor."

ENERGY

UK carbon emissions could turn negative by 2033

Carbon emissions from Britain's electricity system could turn negative by as early as 2033 if the UK uses carbon capture technology alongside more renewable energy to reach its climate targets, according to a report from National Grid.

The electricity network operator set out its vision for an "emissions

negative" grid that would include 30m electric vehicles on UK roads, and 8m heat pumps used to replace gas boilers in energy-efficient homes. National Grid claims that net carbon emissions from the electricity sector could turn negative within 13 years by using carbon capture technology alongside bioenergy sources. It also expects a boom in renewable energy projects, including at least 3GW of new windpower capacity and 1.4GW of solar generation every year from now until 2050.

ASTRONOMY

Volcanoes on Venus show planet is not a dormant world

Scientists have identified 37 volcanic structures on Venus that appear to have been recently active - and probably still are today - painting the picture of a geologically dynamic planet and not a dormant world as long thought.

The research focused on ring-like structures called coronae, caused by an upwelling of hot rock from deep within the planet's interior, and provided compelling evidence of widespread recent tectonic and magma activity on Venus's surface, researchers have said.

Many scientists had long thought that Venus was essentially dormant geologically, having been so for the past half-billion years.

EVOLUTION

Urbanisation led mosquitoes to develop a taste for humans

More species of mosquito may evolve to bite humans instead of other animals because of urbanisation, according to a scientific study. Scientists studied *Aedes aegypti*, an invasive species that has evolved a taste for humans, and become the primary spreader of infectious diseases. By collecting eggs at 27 sites across its ancestral range in sub-Saharan Africa, researchers identified the two major factors in its taste for humans: a dry climate and city life.

**Global report**
United Kingdom

SOCIAL CARE

Higher tax plan for over-40s to fund cost of social care

Everyone over 40 would start contributing towards the cost of care in later life under plans being studied by ministers to finally end the crisis in social care.

Over-40s would have to pay more in tax or national insurance, or be compelled to insure themselves against hefty bills for care when they are older. The money raised would then be used to pay for the help that frail elderly people need if still at home, or to cover their stay in a care home.

The plans are being examined by Boris Johnson's new health and social care taskforce and the Department of Health and Social Care. They are gaining support as the government's answer to the politically perilous question of who should pay for social care.

Sources say the principle of over-40s meeting the cost of a reformed system of care for the ageing population is emerging as the government's preferred option for fulfilling the prime minister's pledge just over a year ago to "fix the crisis in social care once and for all". Social care is a devolved matter but the plans could apply to the whole of the UK as they may involve the tax system.

The system being considered is a modified version of how Japan and Germany fund social care. Both are admired for having created a sustainable way of financing the rising needs of an ageing population.

On Monday, the Guardian reported that social care in England could be taken away from councils and brought under the control of the NHS - which would see the health service's budget soar to £150bn (\$193bn).



◀ Clusters of microbes are seen among starfish on the ocean floor in the Ross Sea in Antarctica, indicating a methane seep

ANDREW THURBER/
REUTERS

2%
The percentage of Covid-19's economic cost that, if spent on protecting wildlife and forests, could prevent pandemics in the next decade, according to research from Princeton

Eyewitness**Walking the talk**

Boris Johnson walks his dog Dilyn at the prime minister's country retreat Chequers. Johnson, who has lost weight since he was hospitalised with Covid-19, has announced plans to tackle obesity, after research has proven that weight has an effect on the severity of coronavirus symptoms. The plan will ban junk food adverts on TV before 9pm and menus in restaurants and pubs will have to display calorie counts, including for alcoholic drinks.

Johnson's wild first year, p20

ANDREW PARSONS/NO 10 DOWNING STREET

**EQUALITY****Working women 'sacrificial lambs' in C-19 economy**

Women are being treated as "sacrificial lambs" as the economy contracts, with half of working mothers unable to access the childcare they need to return to work, according to a survey exposing the scale of Britain's childcare crisis.

As the government was accused by MPs from both sides of the political divide of sidelining women in its response to Covid-19, the survey revealed a lack of childcare played a role in the job losses of almost half of the women made redundant since March. It also reveals that, in the past four months, 67% of key workers were forced to reduce their hours because of a lack of access to childcare, 60% struggled with childcare provision, and 45% did not have the childcare they needed over the summer. Of the 1,756 pregnant key workers who responded to the survey, 30.5% had been suspended on incorrect terms said Pregnant Then Screwed who carried out the study.

COVID-19**'Handbrake' travel rules could extend beyond Spain**

Holidaymakers have been warned the government could impose "handbrake restrictions" on more countries beyond Spain in order to stop the spread of coronavirus - with travellers unlikely to be given much warning if further quarantine measures are enforced.

The restrictions on travellers returning from Spain after the measures were announced late last Saturday, throwing summer holiday plans into disarray for British tourists. The new rules will raise fears among those travelling to other European countries that they could face a similar turnaround at a moment's notice.

**ANTISEMITISM****Chief rabbi accuses social media firms of complicity**

The UK's chief rabbi, Ephraim Mirvis, has accused Facebook and Twitter of complicity in antisemitism through inaction as he urged both platforms to do more to tackle hate speech after an antisemitic tirade last week from the grime musician Wiley.

In a letter to the companies' chief executives, Mark Zuckerberg of Facebook and Jack Dorsey of Twitter, Mirvis said "the woeful lack of responsible leadership ... cannot be allowed to stand."

The chief rabbi, along with many other social media users, were boycotting both platforms, as well as Instagram, for 48 hours starting on Monday morning, he said, in protest.

The protests were prompted by a series of tweets and Instagram posts by Wiley calling for Jews to be shot, and for black people to go to "war" with Jewish people. The messages, initially sent on Friday and Saturday, remained live on both sites for many hours.

Carole Cadwalladr page 45 →

400

*The number of copies of his own book, **The Cleaner**, bought by Mark Dawson, to get it into the Sunday Times hardback Top 10. Dawson subsequently lost his chart position*

The big story

Depopulation

PEAK

DEMOGRAPHICS

For decades we've been living in fear of an unsustainable population bomb. So what if the number of the people on the planet starts to *shrink* instead?

By Michael Safi

U MAN

The battle to feed humanity has been lost, Paul Ehrlich warned in his influential 1968 treatise, *The Population Bomb*. The world's population was growing faster than the Earth could sustain, he predicted, and catastrophe loomed. "In the 1970s and 1980s hundreds of millions of people will starve to death in spite of any crash programs embarked upon now."

That doomsday message turned the entomologist into a celebrity and galvanised population control and environmental movements for years after. But another social wave gathering at the time would help prove his forecasts wildly wrong.

A University of Washington study published in the *Lancet* medical journal this month argued that the world's population would peak at 9.7bn in 2064, then begin to decline. The UN's demographics agency last year forecast the population peak may come later, around the end of the century. For their important differences, both agree: the ranks of humanity are going to start shrinking within a century, and not for reasons of disease or disaster.

A key driver are the feminist movements that were gathering steam as *The Population Bomb* was hitting bookshops. Their victories included new space for people to pursue careers, delay or eschew marriage, and have fewer children or none at all. Given such opportunities, women take them up in numbers so vast that the trajectory of our species is altered, says Christopher Murray, the director of the

University of Washington's Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, and the lead author of the *Lancet* study.

"We've realised there's something different about our species, namely that women can control their fertility," he says. "And as they get more educated and have access to jobs and careers they choose to have fewer children than replacement requires."

As educational opportunities for women have grown and contraceptives have improved in quality and become more easily available, the same trend has been observed from the suburbs of America to the cities of Iran and villages of India. "I have always believed education is the best contraceptive pill," says Poonam Muttreja, the executive director of the Delhi-based Population Foundation of India. "It is the magic contraceptive pill for fertility rates going down."

The world in the year 2100 depicted in the Washington University study differs dramatically from ours: the populations of Japan, Thailand, Spain and 19 other countries will have declined by 50% or more; there will be nearly half as many Chinese citizens as the present day; if size is still linked to geopolitical influence, Nigeria (projected population: 791 million) will have taken its place as a global power.

It will be a significantly older world,

The populations of Japan, Thailand, Spain and others may have halved by 2100

the study says, the implications of which would touch everything from economic productivity, to the kind of culture produced, to the way buildings are designed and beyond. Working-age populations will have declined by several hundred million in India and China. Australia, Canada and the US would keep the size of their workforces steady only by keeping anti-migrant politics in check. Many of those new arrivals would come from sub-Saharan Africa, whose population will have tripled in size.

Far from a future of governments scrambling to feed their populations, as some feared, such projections are driving many to find ways to persuade their citizens to procreate. Hungary's prime minister, Viktor Orbán, promised last year that women who had four or more children would never pay income tax again. Iran's clinics are no longer performing vasectomies or handing out contraceptives.

Stubbornly low birthrates may not just be a matter of empowered people exercising choice. Surveys in highly developed economies show women generally want larger families than they end up having. Feminist activism gave people greater opportunity to work and have fewer children if they wished. The erosion of the welfare state and stagnating middle-class wages in many countries, however, have closed off the choice to spend more time at home and raise a large family. The expected deep recessions caused by the coronavirus lockdown may lead to even fewer children born in the years ahead.

GETTY/GUARDIAN DESIGN



▲ Birthrates in India are falling
ANADOLU AGENCY

Sweden is one of the few countries that found a formula to give its birthrate a jolt, says Murray, using a package of policies including child-care, flexible working conditions and generous maternity and paternity leave packages. But the increase to the fertility rate was marginal – just 0.2 children per woman, he says – and the same policy suite failed to nudge birthrates upwards when applied in countries such as Singapore, Japan and Taiwan. UN research says affordable, widespread and high-quality child-care programmes definitely make a difference, but the benefits of other pro-family policies such as cash payments appear to be less emphatic.

In India, whose population could peak at 1.6 billion in less than two decades according to the University of Washington study, slowing birthrates are welcomed. Muttreja sees the human benefits behind the statistics.

“If you look at the body language of young people in the villages, and especially girls who have gone to school, they look more confident; when you talk to them they have more determination, and many of them are convincing their families not to get them married early, to allow them to study,” Muttreja says.

If the predictions come to pass, the reality of an older, shrinking population is likely to exert a heavier weight on public debates about forces such as capitalism and racism in the decades ahead – or at least it should, Murray says. “It really has a profound effect and people haven’t been thinking about it for a long time.”

“Having a society where the population pyramid is inverted, where there’s fewer people in the age group behind you and more people in the age

group ahead of you – which is where we’re rapidly heading – just has incredibly profound effects on every aspect of how our society is organised,” he says.

As well as relieving the strain on the environment, “peak human” might force a reckoning with economic models that link prosperity to endless growth, says Derek Hoff, an associate professor of University of Utah’s David Eccles School of Business, who has written a book on the debate.

“The argument is that if you don’t have steadily rising populations you can’t have economic growth, and then there is this crisis for social support systems of too many old people and not enough young people to pay for them,” he says.

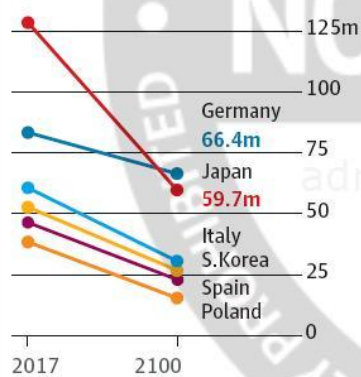
That growth orthodoxy is coming under increasing scrutiny, especially in developed economies. Hoff does not deny that ageing population throws up challenges, “but I don’t think it’s as big a crisis as is being suggested”, he says. “Look at Japan. Everyone says it’s in a demographic downward spiral. But it’s a very rich society and continues to get richer.”

As that debate takes place, the pushback against falling birthrates is likely to intensify. And if people cannot be persuaded to have more children, Murray says some governments might turn to more punitive methods.

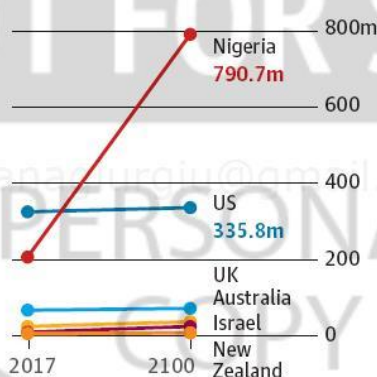
“When societies really start to have geopolitical issues, what’s going to happen?” he says. “I think we will see a lot of energy going into trying to solve this problem. Some of that will be constructive – giving women more support to have careers and children. Some may be a real threat to women’s right to choose.”

MICHAEL SAFI IS AN INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENT FOR THE GUARDIAN

The population of Japan is predicted to fall by half by the end of the century...



...while Nigeria will be home to nearly four times as many people



Source: The Lancet, University of Washington. Selected countries shown

FIRST PERSON

Why a new generation is going child-free

The 20- and 30-somethings of today are making a rational call not to bring more children into an overburdened world

By Sian Cain

When I think that it won’t hurt too much, I imagine the children I will not have. Would they be

more like me or my partner? Would they have inherited my thatch of hair, our terrible eyesight? Mostly, a child is so abstract to me, living with high rent, student debt, no property and no room, that the absence barely registers. But sometimes I suddenly want a daughter with the same intensity my father felt when he first cradled me in his big hands.

Then I remember the numbers. If my baby were to be born today, they would be 10 years old when a quarter of the world’s insects could be gone, when 100 million children are expected to be suffering extreme food scarcity. My child would be 23 when 99% of coral reefs are set to experience severe bleaching. They would be 30 – my age now – when 200 million climate refugees will be roaming the world, when half of all species on Earth are predicted to be extinct in the wild. They would be 80 in 2100, when parts of Australia, Africa and the United States could be uninhabitable.

We are in the middle of a mass extinction, the first caused by a single

Few novels have attempted to tell us what to do in the face of climate catastrophe. Amitav Ghosh has called this “a crisis of imagination”. As Richard Powers writes in his 2018 novel *The Overstory*, “The world is failing precisely because no novel can make the contest for the world seem as compelling as the struggles between a few lost people.”

But even when the future seems like no place for a child, there is always room for them in fiction set at the end of the world: they are emotional ammunition, a reminder of bigger stakes to come. In Lauren Beukes’s forthcoming *Afterland*, a global pandemic that kills only men has led to a “global reprohibition”;

“Having a child is seen as a hopeful gesture, an investment in the future”

Cole, a mother on the run with her mysteriously still-living teenage son, thinks: “When there aren’t going to be any more kids, you want to hold on to their childhood for as long as you can. There must be a German word for that. Nostalgenfreude. Kindersucht.”

Perhaps it is kindersucht we feel when we read novels like *The Children of Men* by PD James, *Future Home of the Living God* by Louise Erdrich, or JG Ballard’s *The Drowned World*, in which children are conspicuous by their presence or absence. Children become resigned to not having the future they should have had; in Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road*, when the father says: “You are not the one who has to worry about everything”, his son counters, “I am the one.” And in Season Butler’s *Cygnets*, a teenager mopes around an island populated only by pensioners waiting out the end as their homes slowly crumble into the sea.

In the real world too, children play a leading role: think of all the kids we’ve seen skipping school to hold signs on the news, or addressing world leaders for us at UN climate summits. It is tragic and effective, and perhaps why every book about the environment right now seems to

be written from the perspective of a parent. Naomi Klein’s *This Changes Everything* starts with her realisation that her toddler may never see a moose. *Notes from an Apocalypse* opens as Mark O’Connell sees a video of a starving polar bear and mourns for his son, who is happily watching a cartoon bear nearby. All these books are well argued, emotive and interesting, but it is remarkable how many of these authors suggest that having a child is a hopeful gesture, a sign of one’s investment in the future. So, we continue to place our hopes in children, even the ones that don’t yet exist. Lee Edelman calls this “reproductive futurism” in his book *No Future*; it is that child, “the fantasmic beneficiary of every political intervention”, that people feel inspired to fight for, the one people mean when they say to women like me: “But what if your child was the one to solve climate change?”

As Sheila Heti writes in *Motherhood*: “I resent the spectacle of all this breeding, which I see as a turning away from the living – an insufficient love for the rest of us, we billions of orphans already living.” And as Greta Thunberg told us all last year: “You all come to us young people for hope. How dare you.”

When asked why I do not have children, I have given various explanations. “I don’t want to” is the only answer that provokes a flinch.

Countless studies have found that people consider child-free adults unnatural and cold. Women in particular bear this burden; former UK prime minister Theresa May and Scottish first minister Nicola Sturgeon have been forced to divulge miscarriages and infertility; the former Australian prime minister Julia Gillard was once criticised for being “deliberately barren”. Still, my generation continues desperately to hunt for things to do in the face of the greatest catastrophe some of us (or our children) may live to see. We give up meat and take holidays closer to home, even when we know that if the super-rich cut their emissions to that of the average EU citizen, global emissions would drop by a third. But we can’t make anyone

else do anything, so we do what we can, and we justify our choices as being meaningful, bigger than us.

Ever since my partner and I concluded that we wanted to be child-free, I have looked to books for positive examples of fulfilling and rewarding lives lived without children. The closest I have found have been eccentric spinsters and ambivalent parents, in a long line from Doris Lessing and DH Lawrence, to Barbara Pym and Rachel Cusk. There are countless mothers who find their intellectual pursuits strangled by their children and absent husbands.

But recently, as millennials are coming of age as both prospective parents and as authors, characters are questioning the status quo. “Fuck all those childbearers and their ‘fulfilling’ lives, never getting to have adventures like mine,” thinks the 38-year-old narrator of Melissa Broder’s *The Pisces*, for whom the prospect of children is “like something mildly distasteful: a piece of onion I would prefer not to put on my plate”. The climate crisis has presented an opportunity to rebrand being child-free, once the greatest taboo, into the ultimate altruistic act. At the same time, parenthood is framed as the ultimate investment in a better future. But choosing to have children is neither inherently good nor selfish, and the same goes for being child-free. We must challenge the orthodoxy that says choosing to live one way is criticism of another. What we need instead is a quiet revolution, a complete reappraisal of what we deem to be a meaningful life.

I, for one, will continue to turn to books, where I find reassurance in the strangest of places. In one tiny strand of *The Overstory*, Ray and Dorothy, a couple who have spent thousands on fertility treatments, finally decided to move on. “In place of children, then, books,” Powers writes. “Ray likes to glimpse the grand project of civilisation ascending to its still-obscure destiny. He wants only to read on, late into the night, about the rising quality of life, the steady freeing of humanity by invention, the breakout of know-how that will finally save the race.” ●

SIÂN CAIN IS THE GUARDIAN’S BOOKS SITE EDITOR



In-depth reporting and analysis

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Britain's
much-delayed
Russia report

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Spotlight



CHINA

China versus the world Will Beijing's belligerence pay off?

By Lily Kuo BEIJING

Last week Chinese leader Xi Jinping held a rare meeting in Beijing with business leaders. Admitting that the Covid-19 pandemic had a "huge impact" on the country's economy, Xi used a Chinese idiom to assure his listeners.

"While the green hills last, there will be wood to burn," he said. "If we maintain our strategy... we will find opportunity in crisis and turbulence. The Chinese people will surely prevail over all difficulties and challenges ahead".

Xi's remarks - reported in state media under the headline: "Xi Jinping conveyed confidence! Confidence!

Nevertheless, confidence!" - belie a difficult and increasingly hostile international environment, one that critics say the Chinese leadership brought on itself through miscalculation and stifled dissent within the ruling party.

In just the last two months, China has ordered the closure of a US consulate in the country's south-west; fought a deadly border clash with India, an unresolved border that threatens to erupt again; seen the abrupt end of the so-called golden era of relations with the UK; engaged in a war of words with Australia, bringing relations close

▲ Xi Jinping is facing a hostile international climate as China's assertive stance meets resistance

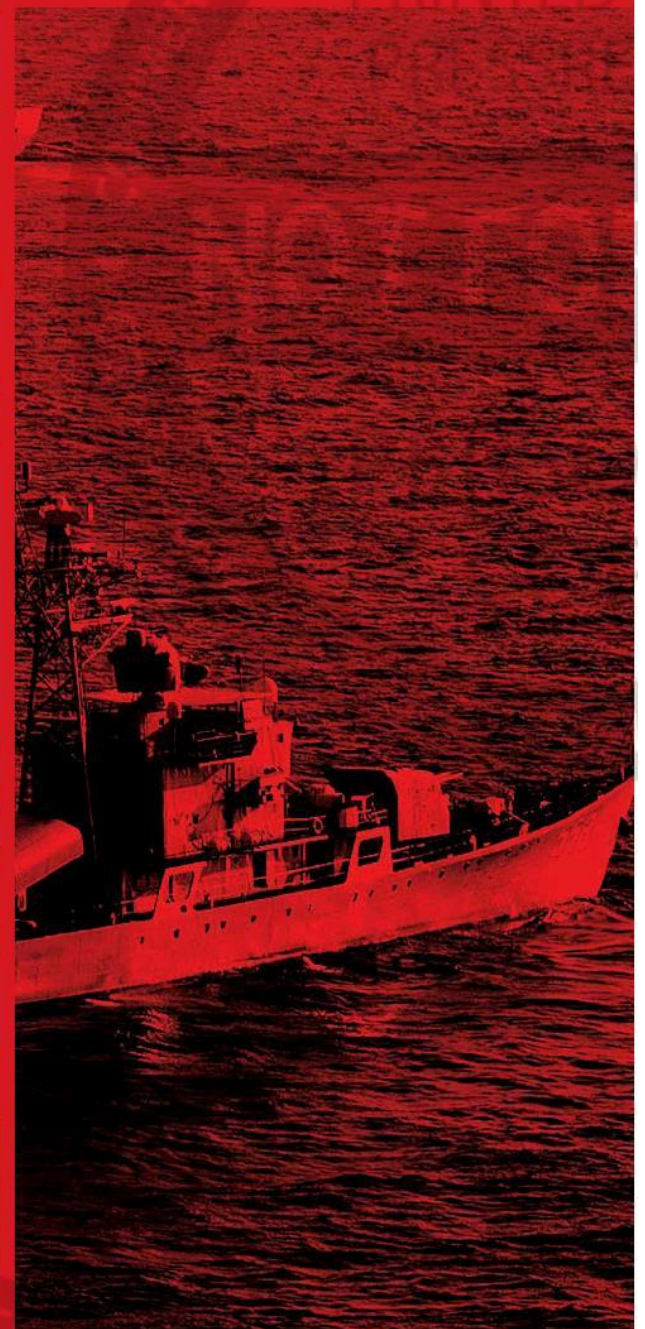
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Attack mode
*Beijing flexes
its muscles*

Ethnic purge
*Uighurs and
other Muslims
held in Xinjiang*

Australia hit
*80% tariffs
placed on barley
imports*

Tit for tat
*Two Canadians
charged in
Huawei matter*

Sea scrapes
*Challenge to
Japan over
disputed islands*



to an all-time low; forced a draconian national security law on Hong Kong, earning international condemnation; and fallen further into a rivalry with the US that is forcing other countries to choose sides. Increasingly, they are choosing the US.

Chinese companies and citizens have begun to suffer the cost of growing mistrust. Fifty-nine Chinese companies have now been locked out of India, one of the world's fastest growing markets, including WeChat and TikTok – a third of whose global users were in India. Chinese national champion Huawei has lost access to a key foothold in Europe as the UK, aligning with the US, announced it was blocking the tech giant.

As countries welcome fleeing Hongkongers, the Chinese territory is likely to see a brain drain. More countries have begun speaking out against China's mass detention of Uighurs and other Muslim minorities in Xinjiang, as

advocates call for sanctions and legal measures. Chinese scientists, students and others have come under more scrutiny abroad.

"This changes the whole narrative of China's intentions. China looks like it has very narrow self-interest that it is pursuing rather than a more cooperative approach, and that means that other countries are going to erect all sorts of barriers. There will be real costs – not just reputational but economic costs," said Susan Shirk, chair of the 21st Century China Center at the University of California, San Diego.

For years, China worked to assure the international community that its rise was peaceful, that it would not try to overturn the status quo. A more assertive China has emerged under Xi, one more willing to confront its critics and brave damage to its reputation. This past year, after containing the

Covid-19 outbreak at home, Beijing has gained the upper hand over some of its rivals, such as the US, still struggling with the pandemic.

"This time they think, 'Maybe we are strong enough. We are equals now and therefore we can cause as much pain to you as us. We can fight'," said Dali Yang, a professor of political science at the University of Chicago.

Chinese officials have ramped up attacks, criticising the US and other western countries for their Covid-19 response, defended its policies in Xinjiang, expelled foreign journalists and quickly implemented the security law in Hong Kong, with arrests made less than a day after the law was passed.

Beijing also finds itself locked in confrontations with countries not traditionally seen as rivals. After Australia pushed for an inquiry into Covid-19, China imposed 80% tariffs on Australian barley and sentenced an Australian man to death. As Huawei

DAVID RAMOS; DALE DE LA REY; LIONEL BONAVENTURE/AFP/GETTY

◀ Security fears have led to Huawei losing its foothold in Europe; riot police detain a protester in Hong Kong; TikTok has been locked out of India; China's South Sea Fleet sail near the disputed Xisha/Paracel Islands

"This time they think 'Maybe we are strong enough'"

Prof Dali Yang
University of Chicago

◀ A protester shows support for Uighurs

DALE DE LA REY/GETTY

CFO Meng Wanzhou's extradition case in Canada proceeds, Chinese courts have begun the formal charges against two Canadians detained in what was widely seen as retaliation. Recent dispatches of Chinese ships to islands claimed by both Japan and China have hurt years of rapprochement.

Analysts have been puzzled by the behaviour of the Chinese leadership over the last few months, cautioning that it is difficult to decipher why certain decisions have been made and who made them. But it is clear that the more centralised leadership of Xi has caused more backlash.

Minxin Pei, an expert on governance in China at Claremont McKenna College, California, said: "Inside the system, voices of dissent, of disagreement are not heard. So one mistake follows another."

At home, China faces the threat of high unemployment as the economy – already slowing before the pandemic – struggles to recover. After the outbreak, online censorship appears to have worsened. Those who have expressed critical opinions of the government or its Covid response have been detained, including a prominent law professor and young internet activists working to save information wiped from the Chinese internet.

For the Chinese leadership, what is most important may not be international reaction but maintaining support from its citizens. Its success over the virus, compared with other countries, appears to have helped. A recent survey of 1,000 urban residents by the China Data Lab at the University of California, San Diego found that trust in the central government has increased. On a scale of one to 10, average trust in the central government was 8.65 at the peak of the outbreak in China in February and 8.87 in May, compared to 8.23 in June last year.

For Xi, who has spent several weeks making appearances around the country – talking with farmers in northeastern China, posing in an attack helicopter while visiting the air force, or giving "important instructions" on floods overwhelming much of the country – that may be more important than any international backlash.

"For the people who are making the decisions, they see it as the price to pay and they are willing to pay it," said Yang.

LILY KUO IS THE GUARDIAN'S BEIJING BUREAU CHIEF

DIPLOMACY

'America first' makes it hard to win allies for China row

By Julian Borger WASHINGTON

The confrontation between the US and China continues to gather pace. The Chinese consulate in Houston has been closed amid allegations it was a spy hub, and in retaliation the US mission in Chengdu was closed on similar grounds. The FBI has started arresting Chinese researchers at US universities with suspected links to the People's Liberation Army. US academics and businessmen are being put under greater scrutiny for ties to Beijing and have been warned to come clean about them under the Foreign Agents Registration Act.

These moves have been accompanied by a concerted set of speeches assailing China by the Trump administration, culminating in an address on 23 July by the secretary of state, Mike Pompeo, declaring: "The free world must triumph over this new tyranny."

Pompeo travelled to Yorba Linda, California, home of the Richard Nixon presidential library, to declare that the Republican president's historic opening to China in 1972 had begun an exercise in failure in east-west detente.

"The kind of engagement we have been pursuing has not brought the kind of change in China that president Nixon hoped to induce," Pompeo said (pictured right). "The truth is that our policies – and those of other free nations – resurrected China's failing economy, only to see Beijing bite the international hands that fed it."

Some of the grand geopolitical language can be put down to Donald Trump's bid to salvage the November election. And some of it is inspired by Pompeo's own efforts to position himself for a presidential run in 2024. But much of what Pompeo had to say will have resonance thanks to Beijing's rising aggression on multiple fronts.

Pompeo argued that combating the grip of the Chinese Communist party "is the mission of our time", a declaration likely to get heads nodding in large parts of Asia and the Pacific at least. But his claim, in his next breath, that "America is perfectly positioned to lead it" will ring hollow among allies.

One of Trump's first foreign policy moves was to pull the US out of negotiations for the Trans Pacific Partnership, which was designed to prevent China being able to dictate the terms of trade in the 21st century. US allies in the region went ahead, but it was severely weakened by the absence of the US.

Similarly, the US effort to persuade China to join arms control negotiations would carry more weight internationally if the Trump administration had not walked out on three arms-control agreements to date and is apparently in the process of jettisoning a fourth, the New Start agreement limiting US and Russian strategic nuclear weapons.

The failure of governance evident in the Trump administration's response to the coronavirus pandemic – which has left the US as the biggest, most enduring hotspot, and Americans banned from travelling to much of the world – has also made it hard for US diplomats to cajole foreign governments into a common cause against China, without drawing pained smiles.

The same could be said for the spectacle of paramilitary units making arrests in Portland, Oregon. In terms of scale, it could not be more different from the mass incarceration of the Uighurs, but it is not a good look for a nation seeking to reclaim the mantle of leadership of the free world.

It is a stroke of luck for US diplomacy that, at a time when it is at its weakest when trying to recruit allies, China is doing much of the job on its behalf.

JULIAN BORGER IS THE GUARDIAN'S WORLD AFFAIRS EDITOR





EUROPE

A continent braces for the impact of a second virus wave

By Sam Jones MADRID, Kim Willsher PARIS, Daniel Boffey BRUSSELS and Kate Connolly BERLIN

Europe is bracing for a second wave of coronavirus as continuing outbreaks raise the prospect of reimposed restrictions at a time when millions of people are travelling across the continent for their summer holidays.

The Belgian government has warned that country could be put into a second “complete lockdown” following a significant spike in infections, while the Spanish region of Catalonia may also have to reintroduce lockdown measures if outbreaks are not brought under control within 10 days.

In France, the health minister has called for greater vigilance after a sharp rise in Covid-19 cases in young people, and Germany’s public health advisory body has said it is “deeply

concerned” about the rise in cases over the past few weeks.

On Monday, Belgium’s prime minister, Sophie Wilmès, announced a series of further restrictive measures but said a second lockdown may be inevitable. “Experts say it is possible to avoid another lockdown,” she said at a press conference. “But it must be remembered that the world’s leading scientists are incapable of knowing how the situation will develop. We must not frighten people, but neither should we abuse them by pretending to know everything.”

There was a 71% increase in the seven-day average number of infections in Belgium between 17 July and 23 July, up from 163 new cases a day to 279. At the height of the pandemic in April, Belgium had more than 1,000 cases a day.

The prime minister said the start of the school year could be under threat without a drastic intervention and said she “very strongly recommended” the return of home working for those who are able to do so. Other measures introduced last Wednesday include restricting a household’s social contact to a further five people. People must go shopping alone and spend no more than 30 minutes in a shop. Antwerp will take extra measures, following a 500% week-on-week rise in infections.

On Monday, the regional president of Catalonia – one of the areas of Spain hardest hit by the virus’s resurgence – said the situation was similar to that before the national lockdown was introduced in March.

“We’re in the 10 most important days of the summer and during that

◀ Extra safety measures return to Antwerp

ROBIN UTRECHT/REX/SHUTTERSTOCK

Belgium
Signs of a second wave

71%
Increase in seven-day average of Covid-19 cases across Belgium, 17-23 July

500%
Week-on-week rise in number of cases in the city of Antwerp, 17-23 July

time, we’ll see whether we’re capable of sorting out the situation through solidarity, cooperation and a collective effort,” said Quim Torra. “But the situation is critical and if we don’t manage to, then we will have to go backwards.”

Many outbreaks have originated in bars and clubs, but other clusters have been traced to seasonal fruit and vegetable pickers.

Last week, Spanish health authorities acknowledged the country may already be experiencing a second wave of infections following the lifting of the three-month lockdown at the end of June.

On Monday, the Spanish health ministry reported 855 new Covid cases over 24 hours down from 922 last Friday and 971 the day before that. Figures showed 6,361 cases were recorded over the weekend, bringing Spain’s cumulative total to 278,782. When the pandemic was at its peak on 31 March, Spain had 9,222 new infections in a single day. The ministry said six people died from the coronavirus in Spain over the seven days to Monday.

The Catalan government has ordered all nightclubs to close for a fortnight and placed a midnight curfew on bars in and around Barcelona and Lleida. It has also advised people in Barcelona to stay at home.

The message was echoed by the French health minister, Olivier Véran, who last weekend urged youngsters to be vigilant. “This is particularly the case in the Île-de-France [Paris] region where we are seeing young people who are infected without knowing how it happened. Clearly, older people are still being very careful, while young people are paying less attention.”

In Germany some experts say the country is on the cusp of a second coronavirus wave, with others saying it has already begun. The country’s public health advisory body, the Robert Koch Institute, has said it is “deeply concerned” about the rise in cases over recent weeks. The number of new cases climbed past 800 on 24 July after several weeks of hovering between 300 and 400. At the pandemic’s height, Germany saw over 6,000 cases a day.

Gerd Antes, a medical statistician in Freiburg, said the concept of the “second wave” created a false impression and that it was more likely the virus would continue to rise and ebb. The challenge, he added, was to be to extinguish the “hot spots” or risk seeing them grow into one large wildfire.

TRANSPORT

Track and pace: sleeper trains see a Covid-19 resurgence

By Daniel Boffey BRUSSELS

For all their promise of romance and adventure, Europe's sleeper trains had appeared to have reached the end of the line. Cripplingly expensive to run and forsaken by travellers for budget airlines, a decision by the German rail operator Deutsche Bahn to terminate the service connecting Paris to Berlin six years ago ushered in the closure of routes across the continent including almost all of France's network.

But as Europe continues to grapple with the coronavirus pandemic, there are tentative signs of a new dawn for the couchettes and bunks, as the concerns of both governments and travellers over the environmental impact of short-haul flights are being complemented by a desire to avoid airports and security queues.

In the last few weeks there has been a flurry of announcements and inaugural journeys. On 23 July the Swedish government said it would provide funds for two new routes to connect the cities of Stockholm and Malmö with Hamburg and Brussels.

A few days earlier, France's transport minister, Jean-Baptiste Djebbari, said an overnight service would be resurrected between Paris and Nice following Emmanuel Macron's Bastille Day promise to redevelop night trains for the nation.

Leading the way has been the Austrian operator Österreichische Bundesbahnen (ÖBB), which had the foresight to buy 42 sleeper cars from Deutsche Bahn in 2016. It has resumed night-time routes connecting Hamburg, Berlin, Munich and Düsseldorf to Austria, Switzerland and Italy.

Despite a recent rise in the number of coronavirus infections in Belgium, up 71% week-on-week, a Brussels-Vienna service, which opened in February offering one-way trips from as low as €29.90 (\$35), will recommence in September.

Along with government action there is evidence of renewed enthusiasm among the paying public too, as people reflect more deeply on how they travel amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

A new night train linking five EU member states – the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia and Croatia – had barely set off from Prague on 30 June when the level of demand from holidaymakers heading to the coast ensured it was upgraded to a daily service.

The Swedish rail company Snälltåget said in June it planned to quadruple the number of night trains on its Stockholm-Malmö-Copenhagen-Hamburg-Berlin route. A new Alpine-Sylt night express that began operating between Sylt in northern Germany and Salzburg in Austria was also due to run for only two months over the summer but will continue until November due to demand.

"What I am told by people using my site is two things in the same breath: they are fed up with the airport experience and they want to cut their carbon footprint," said Mark Smith, who runs the award-winning Man in Seat 61 railway website offering information on pan-European services. "Certainly, in the short term, I am getting people commenting that they don't want to



▲ Austria's ÖBB has resumed night-train routes between German cities and Austria, Switzerland and Italy

HARALD EISENBERGER

fly [because of the pandemic]. I think climate change will be the bigger one in the long term because hopefully this pandemic will [be] over at some point."

The recovery of the night train may not be all smooth running, however, due to the economics of night services.

A normal high-speed train can accommodate 70 people in a coach and take multiple journeys a day, offering a number of stops. A sleeper might hold 20 to 30 beds in a coach but the majority of its passengers will travel end-to-end. The rolling stock is used for just one journey over a 24-hour period.

Train services have had to pay track access charges as they cross borders since 2000. New services run by private companies are often just for the summer, while state operators are taking huge government handouts in order to re-establish their overnight routes. As a result, some night trains journeys that were still running before the pandemic struck may still be discontinued.

Karima Delli, a French MEP who chairs the European parliament's transport committee, welcomed governments' loosening of their purse strings. "Relaunching night trains is both a necessity and an ecological solution to the planet," she said.

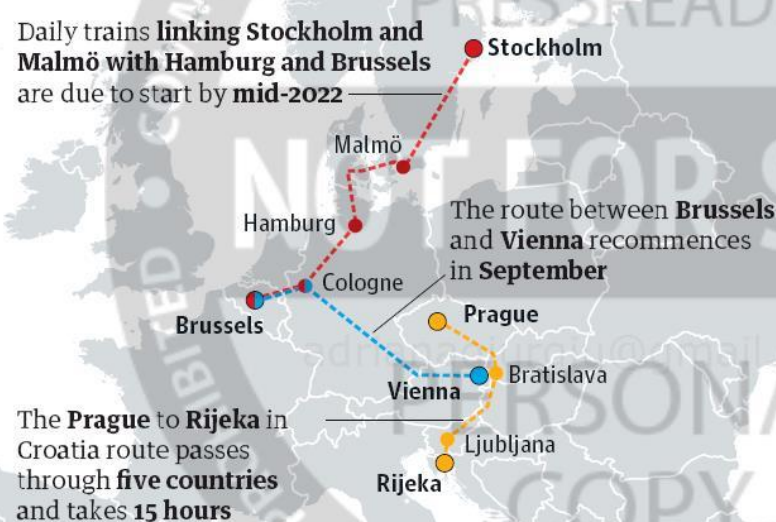
Nick Brooks, the secretary general of the Alliance of Rail New Entrants, which represents independent providers, argued that governments should also prohibit airlines receiving state bailouts from operating any short-haul or late-night flights that could be done by train. "This pandemic must lead to a better appreciation for rail," he said.

DANIEL BOFFEY IS THE GUARDIAN'S BRUSSELS BUREAU CHIEF

Resurgent routes

Night trains routes planned and already in operation across Europe

Daily trains linking Stockholm and Malmö with Hamburg and Brussels are due to start by mid-2022



31 July 2020 The Guardian Weekly

pressreader

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UNITED KINGDOM

'A lifetime in 365 days' Divorced, engaged, new father, hospitalised... Boris Johnson has had a hell of a first year as prime minister. But can this 'good-time' leader ride out the coming economic storm?

By Jessica Elgot, Heather Stewart and Simon Murphy

When Boris Johnson sailed into a meeting of the 1922 Committee of Tory backbenchers on the wave of a seismic election victory, he joked that he was looking forward to seeing how long it would take for letters of no confidence to start pouring in from his colleagues.

A year after he became leader, the Conservative backbenches are already restless. One former cabinet minister said they thought the "clouds had gathered" - and not just because of the pandemic, but owing to a feeling that a "good-time" prime minister was not what was needed for the massive economic challenges ahead.

Even Johnson's critics concede he has had, as one put it, "a hell of a year". One pointed out that Johnson had "been on the backbenches, where he was almost a figure of fun, then won the leadership, divorced his wife, secured a fiancée, fathered a child and nearly died of Covid-19. It's a lifetime in one year."

But they added: "The hard facts are that Boris is a good-time prime minister; his grip on detail is shocking. He's the chairman of the board rather than the chief executive. And he's got a highly contentious, divisive and controversial chief executive in Dominic Cummings."

Though Johnson has a reputation as a genial parliamentary colleague, MPs say he has few trusted friends in the party. "He is not clubbable: he doesn't come into the tearoom, you don't see him around very much," an ex-cabinet minister said. Another MP said: "In this No 10, the Conservative party is just something they need to govern. And the party is becoming gradually unwhippable as a result."

If the economic downturn and the fallout from an inquiry into the pandemic put the party into freefall, some have even begun to think Johnson may need to be replaced before the next election. "The party has no emotional attachment to Boris because he does not give us something to believe in,



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apart from as a vehicle for power," one MP said. "So a year out, if the polls look bad, it could happen."

In anticipation of the possibility that the Tories will be led by someone else by the time of the next election, Labour is pinning responsibility for the failings of the Covid-19 response on the government as a whole.

"They're government decisions, they're Conservative decisions," said one Labour strategist, who added that Keir Starmer was deliberately avoiding personal attacks on Johnson. "People have been trying that for years and it doesn't work. It's a question of competence. It's a question of delivering what you promised."

One former adviser to Theresa May expressed surprise about the discontent of Tory backbenchers. "Given that Boris Johnson has the biggest majority since Blair, that restiveness in the party is a striking thing that I didn't expect," they said.

Tory backbenchers say they need to see a more definitive programme from No 10, and some blame a Downing Street team and cabinet that they say was constructed to deal with Brexit and little else.

"I think Boris has shown in the first year that the government and the team in No 10 is obsessed – and obsessed isn't too strong a word – with Brexit," said one MP, a backer of Johnson's leadership campaign. "And they were caught completely unprepared for Covid because they didn't put together a government that had anything other than Brexit in mind."

One former cabinet minister said the economic challenges ahead went far deeper than dealing with the fallout from coronavirus and were likely to affect the Tories' target voters.

"We're leaving the largest trading free-trade bloc in the world. And we are in the deep freeze with the biggest economy in the world," the former cabinet minister said. "And this is on top of coping with a pandemic. We are a small ship riding into a massive storm – a massive threat to the living standards, financial wellbeing and economic future of people who do vote."

Though Labour may have pinned

'Boris is chairman of the board. Dominic Cummings is his chief executive'

its hopes on Johnson taking the brunt of the blame for any mishandling of coronavirus, it is one area where MPs are prepared to cut the prime minister some slack – and where they believe voters will too.

Johnson's brush with his own mortality sent shockwaves through the party, many MPs said, but several said they felt he was now trying too hard to prove his fitness. "I think people were really worried about him for a while," one former minister said.

Many MPs said Johnson would be the right figurehead for the coming years when the country desperately needs to renew its self-confidence. Steve Brine, the Winchester MP who ran former foreign secretary Jeremy Hunt's leadership campaign, said a press conference in which Johnson held out the hope of a "significant return to normality" by Christmas was a welcome return to the optimism of old. "We need his optimism now more than ever," he said.

Johnson's general election victory in December was defined by the dismantling of the so-called red wall of traditional Labour seats across the north of England, where the call of "get Brexit done" persuaded voters to turn to the Conservatives in droves.

Those new MPs are now keen to see the prime minister deliver "levelling up" and closing the stark economic disparity between north and south.

Some more experienced MPs expressed concern that the narrative may not produce tangible results for their election leaflets. "Levelling up isn't really defined properly. It can't be defined properly, because that's the nature of it. It's something that's generational, not from one election cycle. So you can't declare victory on levelling up," one MP said.

One former cabinet minister cautioned that Johnson should not set too much store by his reputation in ex-Labour seats. "I went to 17 red wall seats. The name Boris Johnson barely came up. The name Jeremy Corbyn came up all the time," the MP said.

Few are daring to predict whether Johnson can keep hold of power beyond the next election. "He is definitely intending to fight the next election. Politicians like Boris are about winning and not about anything else," one frontbencher said.

JESSICA ELGOT, HEATHER STEWART AND SIMON MURPHY REPORT FROM WESTMINSTER FOR THE GUARDIAN

BREXIT

Will the UK and EU get a deal done?

By Daniel Boffey and Lisa O'Carroll

It will all sound very familiar to those who have taken a cursory interest in the Brexit circus over the last four years. The clock is ticking, says the European Union; an Australia-style (no) deal is better than a bad deal, respond the British.

For all the dire warnings and Michel Barnier's claim that a deal is now "unlikely" following last week's talks in London, the wise money would be on history repeating itself: a trade and security deal patched together in October in time for ratification and the start of a new relationship on a firm(ish) footing in 2021.

The long-awaited withdrawal agreement was wrapped up, after all, when Boris Johnson and the Irish prime minister, Leo Varadkar, stitched a deal together in a hotel last October as the reality of a disorderly British exit loomed.

The rational outcome, then, would be for the two sides to avoid adding no-deal salt to the Covid-19 wound. Johnson would welcome the win of avoiding huge tariffs on goods in the context of criticism of his handling of the pandemic, the growing threat of Scottish independence and the rise of Labour leader Keir Starmer.

But there cannot be any certainty. Not a line of agreed legal text has



▲ David Frost of the UK and the EU's Michel Barnier
OLIVER HOSLET/REUTERS

been written down, and there will be hundreds of them to perfect by the end of October ahead of an unwieldy ratification process on the EU side.

The pessimists in Brussels wonder whether Johnson's stated eagerness for a deal will overcome the indifference they detect in some of the former Vote Leave officials around the negotiations.

Sources on both sides agree that there isn't much of a personal understanding between the two principal negotiators – David Frost in the UK camp and the EU's Barnier. Momentum could build for a British exit without a deal should the negotiations become rougher than expected in early autumn.

Barnier's complaint has been that the UK is not playing ball. For all the fireworks last Thursday, a deal still remains the most likely option. Both negotiators need to win over domestic audiences to compromise, and a substantive agreement in July would have suggested that one side was slacking.

But as they head into the final run, there is no agreed choreography. With both sides still doubting the other's intentions going into the summer break, neither Frost nor Barnier will be entirely relaxed as they take their place by the pool.

UNITED KINGDOM

Russia report reveals UK failed to probe meddling

By Dan Sabbagh, Luke Harding and Andrew Roth
MOSCOW

A long-delayed report by a British parliamentary committee released last week revealed the British government and intelligence agencies failed to conduct any proper assessment of Kremlin attempts to interfere with the 2016 Brexit referendum.

The damning conclusion was contained within the 50-page document from parliament's intelligence and security committee, which said ministers in effect turned a blind eye to allegations of Russian disruption.

It said the government "had not seen or sought evidence of successful interference in UK democratic processes", and it made clear that no

serious effort was made to do so.

"The report reveals that no one in government knew if Russia interfered in or sought to influence the referendum because they did not want to know," said Stewart Hosie, a Scottish National party MP who sits on the cross-party committee.

"The UK Government have actively avoided looking for evidence that Russia interfered. We were told that they hadn't seen any evidence, but that is meaningless if they hadn't looked for it."

The committee, which scrutinises the work of Britain's spy agencies, said: "We have not been provided with any post-referendum assessment of Russian attempts at interference".

It contrasted the response with that of the US.

"This situation is in stark contrast to the US handling of allegations of Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election, where an intelligence community assessment was produced within two months of the vote."

Committee members said they could not conclude whether the Kremlin had successfully interfered in the referendum that led to the UK quitting the European Union because no effort had been made to find out.

After the government immediately rebuffed calls for a full investigation, Labour accused it of failing in its response to the security threat posed to UK democracy by Russia.

The shadow home secretary, Nick Thomas-Symonds, said that "on every level, the government's response does not appear to be equal to the threat".

ANALYSIS

'Eye off the ball' What does the Russia report mean for Britain?

By Luke Harding

What does the report tell us?

The Russia report accuses the government of failing to investigate Russian interference in British politics, in particular during the 2016 EU referendum. The language of the Commons intelligence and security committee [ISC] is scathing. It says Downing Street showed a "lack of curiosity" over Kremlin meddling.

The report doesn't say whether this complacency was deliberate or an omission. Either way, it amounts to a stunning rebuke of Boris Johnson and his predecessor as prime minister, Theresa May. We now know why Johnson sought to bury the report before last December's general election. He burned political capital to keep it secret.

The report broadly reflects the expert view of Christopher Steele, a



Four years on we still don't know the extent of Russian meddling in the referendum. Nor did we discover whether it affected the outcome. Leave.EU, funded by the Bristol businessman Arron Banks, claims the report exonerates the campaign, which included multiple meetings

Nonetheless, the ISC is critical of the UK's spy agencies. It suggests that in the 2000s they “took their eye off the ball” – the ball being a resurgent and aggressive Moscow. At the time, the west was busy with the danger from Islamist terrorism. Successive governments “badly underestimated” the threat posed by Putin and the multi-level “response” that was needed. In their submissions, the agencies pushed back against this critique. MI5 says it was preoccupied with dealing with “appalling terrorism”.

LUKE HARDING IS A GUARDIAN
INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENT AND
A FORMER MOSCOW CORRESPONDENT

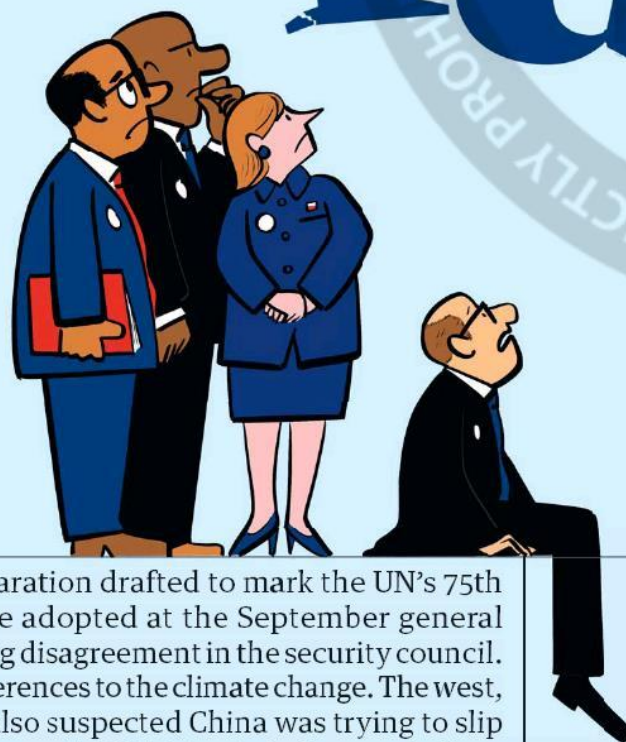
SPECIAL
REPORT

Multilateral

Is it irrelevant in the age of impunity?

As the laws of war become optional and crimes in Syria and Libya go unpunished, there are fears the UN has lost its purpose

By Patrick Wintour
Illustration by Mark Long



Even at the best of times, there is a wide scope for misunderstanding in modern international relations, says António Guterres, the UN secretary general. “When two diplomats meet,” he says, “there are at least six perceptions to manage: how the two perceive themselves, how they perceive each other – and how they think the other perceives them.”

Months into the coronavirus epidemic and it is the worst of times – and the opportunities for misperception have multiplied. The virus has left the UN members talking past one another, and advocates of multilateralism increasingly looking anywhere but the security council to promote liberal democracy, seek compromise or campaign for accountability.

For Guterres, this is deeply frustrating. He was one of the first world leaders to grasp the seriousness of the pandemic, and saw an opportunity for the 15-strong UN security council to play a convening role.

He tried, for instance, to make the UN relevant back in late March by calling for a worldwide ceasefire to give the doctors space and time to save lives. It was unashamedly idealistic, but some militias in Cameroon, Thailand and the Philippines agreed to a time out.

But then arguments between China and the US over Covid-19 held up the resolution for months. The US objected to any positive reference to the UN World Health Organization (WHO) in the text. The only body to be demobilised, Guterres discovered, was the UN itself.

Three months later, the resolution was finally agreed, excluding any direct reference to the WHO. In the meantime, 12 million people had been infected by the virus and 500,000 had died – and momentum on the ceasefire had been lost. By contrast, in 2014 the security council had passed a resolution on Ebola in one day.

Similarly, a declaration drafted to mark the UN’s 75th birthday, due to be adopted at the September general assembly, led to long disagreement in the security council. The US opposed references to the climate change. The west, including Britain, also suspected China was trying to slip some Chinese communist thinking into the resolution, and objected. Agreement was finally reached, but for most people it was a theological dispute comprehensible to a handful of diplomats.

Guterres admits the security council at this supremely global moment had offered little but paralysis: “Relations between the most important powers, the USA, China and Russia, are more dysfunctional than ever. Unfortunately, where there is power, there is no leadership, and where there is leadership, there is lack of power. Furthermore, when we look at multilateral institutions, we have to recognise that they have no teeth. Or, when they do, they don’t have much of an appetite. They don’t want to bite.”

This degree of gridlock has had consequences way beyond the loss of an abstract concept – the liberal rules-based order. We are, in the words of David Miliband, CEO of the international rescue committee and a former Labour foreign secretary, “living through the age of impunity”.

“Anything goes. And the law is for suckers. A time where war crimes go unpunished and the laws of war become optional. A time when militaries, militias and mercenaries in conflicts around the world believe they can get away with anything, and because they can get away with anything, they do everything,” he said.

Syria acts as exhibit A to illustrate Miliband’s point. Geir Pedersen, the fourth UN special envoy since the civil war started in 2011, already questions his value. “When I asked friends and colleagues should I take on this job, they said you must be crazy, I thought maybe after eight years of conflict the time was getting more ripe for settling the conflict,”

‘Anything goes. And the law is for suckers. Because they can get away with anything, they do everything’

eralism.

he said. "What I expected was the lack of trust between the parties, but not *the deep distrust between the international parties and that is something I am struggling with.*"

Russia has used its veto power an astonishing 16 times in Syria, twice in the past month to block humanitarian aid into the country.

Libya could act as exhibit B. It, too, has been locked in an on-off civil war since 2011, while the UN watches its own arms embargo openly flouted.

Ghassan Salamé, former UN special envoy for Libya, makes a brutal wider analysis of what is going wrong: "In the cold war, the security council was blocked by the mutual veto. Nowadays we are blocked by the disintegration of the idea of collective security. It is not there in the council. We went in the 80s through a period of financial deregulation, what is called neoliberalism ... We are now going through a period of deregulation of force. Now everybody who has the means to do something - and a lack of internal constraints, such as a parliament - has the means to act and there is no one to tell them: 'You cannot do that'. Let's face it, it makes democracies weaker. Why do we not say that publicly?"

"It is not because democracies produce weak regimes, but democracy needs multilateralism."

Harold Koh, legal adviser to the state department under Barack Obama and professor of international law at Yale University, argues that we are living through a pivotal moment, second only to the second world war. "Back in the 1790s Immanuel Kant made a very simple argument. He said we do not need world government. What we need is democratic nations committed to human rights and the rule of law cooperating for shared ends."

"Essentially he was calling for a United Nations system. The alternative, less clearly expressed, is Orwell's Ninety Eighty-Four - spheres of superpower influence where there are no values, people lie, change enemies and friends day to day. Leaders are authoritarian at home, and pat dictators on the back abroad."

Most believe that the Orwellians are winning - if only because China and the US's visions of the post-imperial world order appear so incompatible. But Mary Robinson, the chair of the Elders, the group of senior former UN leaders, said it is too soon to read the last rites for multilateralism. The movement has gone through a bumpy undefended period, she recently told Chatham House, London the non-profit organisation that aims to analyse and promote the understanding of major international issues. But as recently as 2015 the world came together

on climate change and global development goals, she said. "No event could have more clearly made the case for multilateralism - the simple idea of cooperation between countries to solve problems that are too big for one country," she said.

But what would renewal of multilateralism look like?

If Joe Biden wins the US election this November, probably the most pro-Atlanticist politician in America will enter the White House. He has already said he will review Donald Trump's troop withdrawal from Germany and promised to hold a summit of democracies. Above all, the whole tone of transatlantic discussion would change.

But a Biden White House would not end the rivalry with China and Russia, or restore the rare period of American hegemonic power at the end of the cold war.

Joseph Nye, the first exponent of "soft power" and professor at Harvard's Kennedy school of government, has outlined a new order. Writing in Project Syndicate, he said: "If Joe Biden is elected, the question he will face is not whether to restore the liberal international order. It is whether the US can work with an inner core of allies to promote democracy and human rights while cooperating with a broader set of states to manage the rules-based international institutions needed to face transnational threats such as climate change, pandemics, cyber-attacks, terrorism, and economic instability."

Such a new order would involve two tiers of multilateralism for the US, one with allies and the other with rivals. China and Russia would have to be treated as revisionist participants in the existing international order, not solely as enemies standing outside of it.

America has to move from unpredictable episodic strategic competition with China, the custom under Trump, to systematic strategic competition. Clearer red lines between China and the west would allow multilateralism to thrive.

Remarkably, one of the optimistic views on the future of international co-operation comes from the man who oversaw the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide. Roméo Dallaire, the Canadian former general and senator who served as force commander for UNAMIR, the UN peacekeeping force in Rwanda, between 1993-1994, said: "I think we are in a revolutionary time ... The under-25s are going to start to be very active and they are going to start demanding that humanity is treated as one."

"They are a generation without borders. This generation will have the means through the incredible weapons of social media. They have the power to push aside the leaders that hold them back."

PATRICK WINTOUR IS THE GUARDIAN'S DIPLOMATIC EDITOR

'No progress'

Geir Pedersen says he is frustrated with the situation in Syria: "I brief the council every month and sometimes I think there is not much new to say. There is a deep frustration that after nine and a half years the political process has not been able to deliver any progress. No progress on the economy, detainees or what you can do for the dignified return for refugees. With a conflict that has been going on for so long, I worry it becomes part of the normal scenery. We have thousands of people killed and it is not even close to headlines any more."

CLIMATE CHANGE

Taking the heat ... What sets Red Sea coral apart?

Reefs from Gulf of Aqaba in the Red Sea manage to survive rise of seven degrees, astonishing marine scientists

By Michael Safi

The scientists cranked the heat above the lethal threshold, and waited for the corals to die.

"We were heating the water one degree above the summer maximum temperature," said Anders Meibom, a researcher with the Institute of Earth Sciences at the University of Lausanne. "On the Great Barrier Reef, after a couple of weeks of that they'd start dying."

But the corals taken from the Gulf of Aqaba, a trench of water that protrudes from the Red Sea, lapping Jordan, Israel, Saudi Arabia and Egypt, seemed untroubled by the temperature.

"So we increased to two degrees," Meibom said. "Now, they're supposed to die. Instead they looked happier."

They raised the heat again. "Three degrees now, this is ridiculous," Meibom said. "We were thinking, this is nonsense - they're supposed to be dead. But they didn't even look stressed. So, we went up to four degrees."

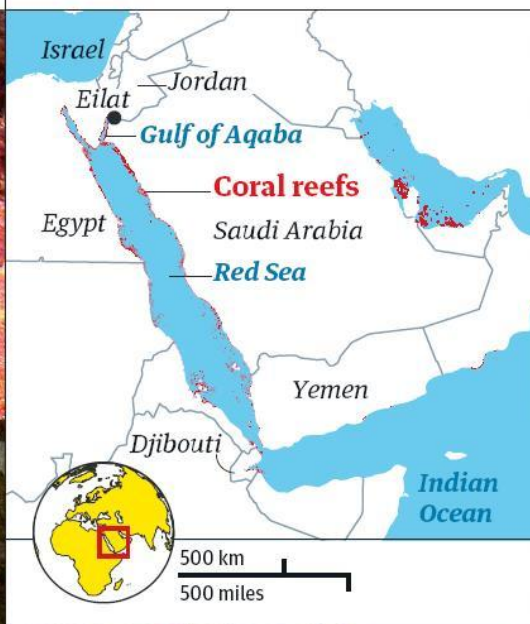
Coral science in past years has become the study of an ecosystem in freefall. Coral reefs, some of the world's richest environments, are regularly undergoing mass "bleaching" as a result of abnormally high ocean-surface temperatures and increased acidification, both consequences of global heating. The loss of colour - the result of an expulsion of the microscopic algae that sustain the creatures - is a vivid sign that corals have become severely vulnerable to further heat and disease.

Half of the world's coral reefs are thought to have died in the past three decades, and up to 90% of existing coral reefs may die by the middle of the century, according to research this year.

Yet the coral in the experiment at the University of Eilat survived, even as temperatures were raised to five, then six, then seven degrees. "They even showed improved physiological performance at higher temperatures," said Maoz Fine, the professor of marine

▲ A diver looks at soft corals on the Cedar Pride shipwreck, just off the coast of Jordan

ALAMY



science who led the research. "At first we weren't so sure we were doing everything right, experimentally."

Their results confirmed years of reports from divers in the Gulf of Aqaba and northern Red Sea. Despite ocean-surface temperatures in the area warming at the same rate as elsewhere, coral species there have never suffered a documented bleaching event. A growing body of research from across the region is leading marine scientists to a compelling possibility: that a large range of corals along the 4,000km Red Sea reef are uniquely resistant to the climate crisis.

"We realised, holy shit, we have an unbelievable situation," Meibom said. "This is the only coral reef ecosystem that has a chance to withstand the two-to-three degrees of extra heat that we'll now unavoidably have by the end of the century."

If it can survive the neighbourhood. Protecting the reef from other threats such as pollution and overpopulation will require one thing above all, the scientists said: persuading at least four Middle Eastern governments - not all of whom recognise each other's existence - to work together.

The Red Sea feeds into the Indian Ocean through a shallow strait between Djibouti and Yemen about 30km wide. More than 2.5m years ago, during the last ice age, the strait receded, cutting off the Red Sea and rendering it inhospitable.

"It got super hot, supersalty and just about everything died," said Karine Kleinhaus, a professor of marine science at Stony Brook University in New York.

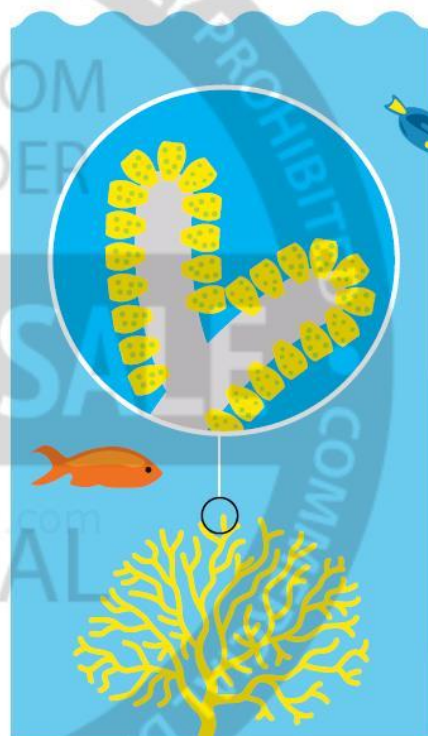
When the ice caps melted, the strait reappeared, and plant and animal life flooded back. The coral species that made the arduous journey north through the Red Sea underwent generations of evolutionary selection. "Only those who could withstand the very high salinity and temperatures could move north and colonise," Kleinhaus said.

Many of the coral species that inhabit the Red Sea reef were forged by that migration, scientists believe, and can survive, and even flourish, in ocean temperatures hotter than those forecast in the decades ahead.

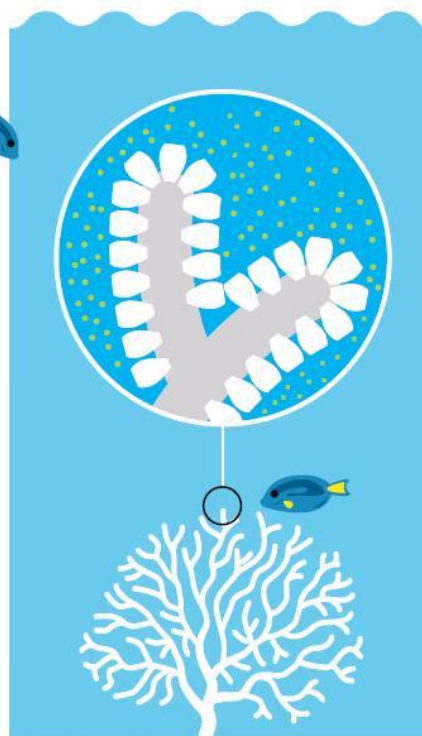
The implications for coral reefs elsewhere in the world are still being studied. Transplanting hardy coral

Why do corals bleach?

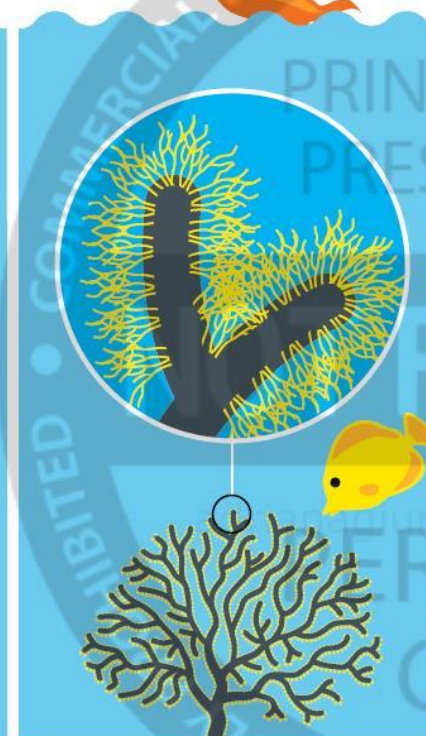
Under normal circumstances, rising water temperatures can doom reefs



Healthy coral Tiny plants called zooxanthellae feed animal polyps through photosynthesis on the coral. Interactions between the two generate corals' brilliant colours



'Bleached' coral If high water temperatures persist for a week or more, the polyps reject their plants and the coral appears 'bleached'. If this persists for too long, the coral dies



Dead coral Algae grows on dead coral making it impossible for new colonies to form. If there are enough fish on the reef, they can clean the algae away and allow corals to return

species to other reefs has not generally worked in the past, said Meibom.

"The salinity of the water and the ecosystem of microbes is different," he said. "A few species survive, but they're not happy, and many of them die."

Another possibility is figuring out exactly how Red Sea corals survive extreme conditions, and then steering the evolution of species elsewhere to select for those qualities. The problem is that scientifically assisted evolution still takes time, and reefs are being pummeled by heatwaves at an accelerating rate.

Research into the Red Sea corals is still in its early stages. "We don't really know what is going on biologically that allows these corals to thrive with temperature disruptions that are killing coral in other places," Kleinhaus said.

Progress is being slowed by lack of funds and shutdowns and travel restrictions as a result of coronavirus, but also the region's tense politics. Gathering scientists from across the region to mount a research expedition at different points in the reef, for example, has been hampered by Saudi Arabia's reluctance to allow Israeli scientists in its territorial waters. "Everything is a challenge in this region," Fine said.

Threats to the reef will accumulate in the decades ahead. Populations

along the Red Sea in Israel, Egypt and Jordan are expected to surge. Saudi Arabia is planning to build a futuristic megacity on the edge of its waters. "Even though the reef is resistant to climate change, it's not going to be immune to unsustainable development, pollution, sewage, or hyper-saline discharge from desalinisation plants," Kleinhaus said.

No one country can protect it alone, says Olivier Küttel, from the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Lausanne.

"Egypt can do well, but if Saudi Arabia, Israel or Jordan do poorly, they can very rapidly destroy the whole ecosystem," he said.

Jordan's King Abdullah II is among those lobbying to have the reef recognised on Unesco's Marine World Heritage List, which proponents hope will raise the status of the area, make it easier to attract funding for research and pressure governments to protect it.

Half of the world's coral reefs are thought to have died in the past three decades

MICHAEL SAFI IS AN INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENT, BASED IN THE MIDDLE EAST

► Gulf of Aqaba corals are thriving

MAOZ FINE



Britain's most polluting region is poised to lead a green energy revolution. But can the hydrogen dream ever become reality?

Time to give it the gas



HYDROGEN POWER

By Julian Coman

At the entrance to Saltend Chemicals Park, on the outskirts of Hull, on England's North Sea coast, there is a small blue heritage-style plaque, placed there four years ago by the Royal Society of Chemistry. It proudly commemorates: "100 years of innovation in supplying the UK with transportation fuels and important base chemicals."

A sense of pride in Saltend's past is understandable: places like this helped drive Britain's industrial age. But the biggest, most dramatic innovation of all may be yet to come. This month, the Norwegian energy company, Equinor (formerly Statoil), unveiled proposals to install the biggest facility in the world for making hydrogen from natural gas, using capture and storage technology to extract and bury the resulting carbon under the North Sea.

The Humber region is currently the biggest emitter of carbon in Britain and the second-highest emitter in Europe. Equinor's plan, if it goes ahead, would amount to a green revolution at

Saltend, allowing businesses on the site to convert to clean energy. And if the rest of the region follows suit, by 2030 this windblown stretch of coastline could conceivably be one of the world's leading green energy hubs.

"This is a plan," said Al Cook, Equinor's vice president, "which would help transform the UK's largest industrial cluster into its greenest cluster. We are one of the largest energy producers in the world. Saltend is one of the oldest industrial hubs of its kind. Humberside has all the natural resources required on its doorstep. It is a chance for the UK to get on the front foot in the green energy race."

Get ready for Britain's hydrogen boom? Definitely maybe.

Hydrogen has been the next big thing for longer than its advocates would care to remember. Before Elon Musk, Tesla and electric battery technology, it was commonly assumed that we might all, one day, be driving hydrogen cars. The traditional drawback for investors has been the expensive complexity of actually producing the

stuff. But in an era of net zero carbon emissions targets, the green utility of the most common chemical element in the universe is turning it into one of the most fashionable products on earth.

"Blue" hydrogen - the kind Equinor hopes to produce in Hull - can be made almost carbon-free from natural gas, by using the capture and storage technology. For groups such as Friends of the Earth, "almost" is not good enough, and the enormous cost of capture and storage has also generated scepticism.

Green hydrogen, on the other hand, which is made from renewable sources, bypasses fossil fuels



► The UK led the way on wind farm technology but failed to capitalise

CHRIS LAURENS/ALAMY



Shock troops

UNITED STATES

The battle of Portland

Trump's pre-election 'surge' of unaccountable federal agents in Oregon is 'made-for-TV fascism', say critics

By Tom McCarthy

With an election looming and the polls looking bad, Donald Trump was in need of a quick political boost. Seizing on television images of a procession of refugees out of Honduras, the president announced an imminent "invasion" of the United States by a "migrant caravan" and said he would deploy 15,000 military personnel to stop it. For weeks, Fox News blared "coverage" of the emergency.

That was in October 2018, and as a political strategy ahead of the midterm elections, the gambit utterly failed.

The Democrats flipped 40 seats in

the House of Representatives the next month and racked up the largest popular vote margin in midterm election history, on the highest turnout in 100 years. The "caravan" emergency was heard of no more.

Now two years later, Trump is facing an even bigger election, with an even bigger need for a political masterstroke if he is to win a second term in November. Instead of deploying troops to the border to confront a made-up threat, Trump has announced "a surge of federal law enforcement into American communities" to fight a supposed cataclysm of violence born

of a Democratic plot to undermine local police.

"The effort to shut down policing in their own communities has led to a shocking explosion of shootings, killings, murders and heinous crimes of violence," Trump said at the White House last Wednesday. "This bloodshed must end."

The deployment against anti-racism protesters is a ploy to burnish his strongman credentials, critics say - Trump is pursuing made-for-TV fascism, with the imposition of federal forces into US cities against the will of local authorities. As with 2018, the unmistakable

▲ Federal agents have been called into downtown Portland, Oregon, by the Trump administration following protests

SPENCER PLATT/GETTY



bogeyman is people of colour, whom Trump portrays as posing an existential threat to the country that only he can defend against.

In some respects, the strategy has a long pedigree, going back to the 1968 “law and order” presidential campaigns of Richard Nixon and George Wallace, the Alabama segregationist. But there is a crucial difference between Trump’s foreign “invasion” charade of 2018 and his current domestic “crime explosion” ploy, analysts say.

Unlike the deployment of troops to a US border, the deployment of federal troops inside American cities threatens to fulfil its own fantasy, turning a dark and opportunistic fable spun by the White House into a daunting reality in which violent clashes really do play out in the streets and unaccountable federal law enforcement officers round up and detain US citizens.

“What one has to ask is, how much is spectacle and how much is reality?” said Jason Stanley, a Yale philosophy professor and author of *How Fascism Works*. “Now, the spectacle should already worry us, because he did the spectacle in Lafayette Square,” Stanley said, referring to Trump’s violent clearance of peaceful protesters from a park near the White House in June.

“Then he did the spectacle in Portland. And when you allow too much spectacle, as it gets worse over time, people start to say, ‘This has been happening for awhile, what’s the big deal?’

“The spectacle normalises, and then you can’t tell if it’s still spectacle any more. It’s spectacle until someone gets hurt.”

Just how big a spectacle the White House has planned for the run-up to the November elections is unknown. In Portland, federal officers have shot protesters and used unmarked vehicles to detain activists, and graffiti writers have been branded as “violent anarchists”. Trump plans to deploy troops from at least five federal agencies to Chicago and to Albuquerque, New Mexico, the justice department announced this week.

Other cities including New York, Philadelphia, Detroit, Seattle, Baltimore, Oakland and Milwaukee have been named for potential future deployments, despite the unambiguous objections of those cities’ mayors.

“Unilaterally deploying these paramilitary-type forces into our cities is wholly inconsistent with our system of democracy and

UNITED STATES

Why is Trump targeting big cities?

By *Chris McGreal*
PORTLAND
Martin Pengelly NEW YORK

What is happening in Portland?

Since the killing of George Floyd by police officers in Minneapolis on 25 May, protesters have been out on the streets every night in the largest city in Oregon.

Why are federal agents involved?

Seeking to focus his re-election campaign on law and order – and, many would argue, to exploit racial tension and division – Trump has sent in officers from agencies under the Department of Justice and Department of Homeland Security, to reinforce and in some cases replace local police.

What does Trump hope to gain?

The president has been accused of indulging in “performative authoritarianism” and “made-for-TV fascism”, but as he trails Joe Biden in national and battleground state polls he is hoping to rev up his base. Trump has painted the protests as fuelled by “anarchists”

whom Democrats are afraid to take on. Agents are already in Kansas City and will be sent to Chicago, where gun violence has risen sharply, and Albuquerque, New Mexico. Other cities could follow. As in Portland, the Chicago move sparked confrontation with a Democratic mayor.

Why is Trump targeting other cities?

On 22 July, Trump announced a “surge” of federal officers to Chicago ostensibly to combat gun crime and other violence. In response the mayors of Chicago, Los Angeles, Atlanta and 11 other cities wrote to the administration, accusing the president of an abuse of power and alleging that “federal law enforcement is being deployed for political purposes”.

What are the agents doing?

Many have operated without identification and in camouflage gear, using tactics denied to police by the courts: firing teargas or, according to witness accounts provided to the Guardian, seizing protesters and holding them without due process. Like police officers, agents have been accused of using undue violence. According to Trump press secretary Kayleigh McEnany, the White House “always encourage[s] the appropriate use of force”.

Are protesters violent?

The demonstrations evolve each night. Large protests that begin around dusk, which have been swelling by the day, are invariably peaceful and generally keep the focus on the Black Lives Matter cause. They are held in front of the county Justice

Center and jail, on the block next to the federal courthouse. Authorities have not interfered.

After that, many protesters go home while others move across to the courthouse guarded by federal paramilitaries. Some have attempted to break boarding on the courthouse windows, barricaded the entrance and lit fires under the building’s portico.

A small hard core of protesters, kitted out in helmets and gas masks, turns out each night looking for a fight and have been criticised by some black leaders for distracting from the Black Lives Matter cause. However, the federal intervention has boosted support for these protests.

What do Trump’s opponents say?

Portland’s mayor, Ted Wheeler, has said the agents are making the situation worse. After he was caught up in a teargassing, he said its use was unjustified and unprovoked. Critics pointed out that Portland police, over whom Wheeler has authority, have regularly used teargas against Black Lives Matter protesters.

A US senator from Oregon, Jeff Merkley, described the use of federal paramilitaries as “an all-out assault in military-style fashion”.

Will it work for Trump?

Recent polling suggests not, putting Biden as the candidate Americans trust more to handle law and order. But it’s going to be a long, hot summer. Protesters show no sign of backing down. Nor does Trump.

CHRIS MCGREAL AND MARTIN PENGELLY WRITE FOR GUARDIAN US



► A New York protest in solidarity with Portland

Spotlight North America



our most basic values,” more than a dozen mayors of major US cities warned Trump in an open letter. Trump is correct that some US cities have seen increases in gun violence in recent months, but crime is down overall in 2020, and Trump is virtually alone in seeing a heavy-handed federal response as palliative.

Criminal justice experts have tied upticks in violence to the ravages of the coronavirus pandemic, which has now killed about 150,000 Americans; historic unemployment; social unrest following the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis in May; seasonal fluctuations and other factors.

In any case, phalanxes of heavily armed officers descending on largely peaceful protesters risks sparking violence and unravelling months of work to establish community dialogue about police violence and racial injustice, the mayors have warned.

Julia Azari, a professor of political science at Marquette University, noted that crime is not currently a top issue for a majority of US voters and said that the Trump campaign was working on a tenuous strategy of a narrow win through the electoral college. “This has really never been a majority-focused administration,” Azari said. “In some ways

it’s been an administration focused on mobilising a particular segment of the American electorate, which is sort of strategically located throughout the states that are important in the electoral college. It’s a very uphill strategy.”

Trump can appear to be cornered. Polling indicates that Americans think he is wrong about the street protests, they disapprove of his performance as president overall by more than 55% on average, and they disapprove of his handling of the coronavirus pandemic specifically by a whopping 60%.

But Trump has been cornered in the past, as when he was supposed to lose in 2016. Then as now, Trump lashed out on race. Talking about crime in big cities “can be dog whistles for racial divisions” to Trump supporters, especially in the midwest, who as a group are older, more white and more rural than the average US voter, Azari said.

But emphasising chaos is a questionable strategy for an incumbent president, she said. “For most swing voters, the question comes down to, ‘Are things good, are things not good?’ And I don’t see this story as being a really compelling way to reframe the situation as like, ‘things are good’.”

Even if Trump loses in November, his gestures in the direction of fascist

▲ Protesters clash with federal officers in Portland

CHRIS TUIE/IMAGESPACE
/REX/SHUTTERSTOCK

Trump’s bogeyman is people of colour, whom he portrays as posing an existential threat

politics – made-for-TV or not – will not be easy to erase, because Trump’s politics are merely a current expression of a 30-year Republican arc, said Stanley.

“There has been a long buildup before Trump,” Stanley said. “A core to authoritarianism – whether fascism or communism – is the one-party state. And Republicans for years before Trump, all the way back to [former House speaker] Newt Gingrich, who I blame all of this on, have been acting like their political opponents are traitors and not legitimate opponents.”

Stanley praised Joe Biden, Trump’s 2020 rival, for pursuing multi-party politics. “What Biden’s doing is very impressive in that he is constantly – at first I criticised it – he is constantly talking about a return to a multi-party system, where we are going to prize the fact that we have different viewpoints, and that’s the core of our democracy.

“This idea that you can have people who differ and are Republicans or Democrats, and can have different views and can come together, is a repudiation of the Newt Gingrich-led attempt to undermine democracy and place Republicans in power by declaring the opposition party illegitimate.”

TOM MCCARTHY IS NATIONAL AFFAIRS CORRESPONDENT FOR GUARDIAN US

UNITED STATES

Would a Trump win set the Paris accords on fire?

By Oliver Milman NEW YORK

It was a balmy June day in 2017 when Donald Trump took to the lectern in the White House Rose Garden to announce the US withdrawal from the Paris climate agreement, the only comprehensive global pact to tackle the spiralling crisis.

Todd Stern, who was the US's chief negotiator when the deal was sealed in Paris in 2015, forced himself to watch the speech. "I was furious ... because here we have this really important thing and here's this joker who doesn't understand anything he's talking about. It was a fraud," said Stern.

The terms of the accord mean no country can leave before November this year, so due to a quirk of timing, the US will officially exit the Paris deal on 4 November - just under 100 days from now and one day after the 2020 presidential election.

Joe Biden has vowed to rejoin the climate agreement. The lifetime of the Paris agreement, signed in a wave of optimism in 2015, has seen the five hottest years ever recorded on Earth, unprecedented wildfires torching towns from California to Australia, record heatwaves baking Europe and India and temperatures briefly bursting beyond 38C in the Arctic.

The faltering global effort to curb greenhouse gas emissions and head off further calamity hinges, in significant part, on whether the US decides to re-enter the fray. Nearly 200 countries put their name to the Paris accords, pledging to face down the climate emergency and limit the average global temperature rise to "well below" 2C above the era before mass industrialisation. A more aspirational

goal of halting temperatures at a 1.5C rise was also included although, just five years on, the planet is already creeping perilously close to this mark.

The Paris deal brought major, growing emitters like China and India on board with the quest to shift towards cleaner sources of energy, in part due to the urgings of Barack Obama.

Trump, who once called climate science a "hoax", has never looked kindly on the deal, which he framed as an international effort to damage the US while letting China off too lightly. The US government in practice abandoned any concern over the climate crisis some time ago, with the Trump administration so far rolling back more than 100 environmental protections.

Despite all this, US emissions have continued to fall, due in large part to the downfall of a coal industry that Trump has attempted to prop up. The international ramifications have been telling, however - in the absence of any sort of positive cajoling from the US, global emissions have remained stubbornly high and most countries are lagging behind their promised actions.

According to the Climate Action Tracker, only Morocco is acting consistently with the agreement's goals, with the global temperature rise set to exceed 3C by the end of the century even if the current pledges are met.

Paris was meant to be only the beginning. "There's been less political will from other countries to take action to a certain extent because the US isn't pushing for it," said Sue Biniaz,

a former US state department lawyer who drafted parts of the Paris deal.

"During the first four years of Trump it's easier to say it's likely to be an aberration, a short-term deviation, but if it's eight years it's harder to keep together the coalition of countries that care about this."

Another four years of Trump could set back global emissions cuts by a decade, according to one analysis, making the chances of meeting the Paris goals nearly impossible.

But even with an engaged Biden administration that is somehow able to get Congress to agree to a \$2tn plan to shift the US on to renewable energy the challenge is immense.

The world will have to slash emissions by more than 7% a year this decade to have any hope of meeting the 1.5C target, according to the United Nations. This annual cut will be achievable this year only through the devastation of the coronavirus pandemic. A more sustainable path to decarbonisation will need to be immediately identified and implemented.

Stern said American voters will be "supersonic focused" on coronavirus and the fallout. "But climate change can't be forgotten this election," he said. "The Covid crisis has shown us countries can do remarkable things in short order. It shows us we need leaders who also understand what we need to do on climate change, because that is another meteorite heading our way."

OLIVER MILMAN IS AN ENVIRONMENT REPORTER FOR GUARDIAN US

The heat is on The impact of a 2C rise

- Seas could rise by an average of 56cm
- 30m people in coastal areas could be flooded each year by 2055
- 37% of the population could face a severe heat wave at least every five years
- 388m people could be exposed to water scarcity and 195m to severe drought
- Global per-capita GDP could fall 13% by 2100

▼ Wildfire in Healdsburg, California, in 2018

PHILIP PACHECO/AFP/GETTY





The wildfires that swept Australia in 2019 and 2020 were on an unimaginable scale. By the end of February, they had destroyed about 85,000 sq km of forest and killed an estimated 1bn animals, 34 people and destroyed almost 6,000 buildings.

But what does the landscape look like now? With Covid-19 closing state borders, the Guardian took a virtual journey through the blackened path of Australia's summer of bushfires





📍 Above, Kangaroo Island was badly damaged during the 2019/20 bushfire season, but there are already hopeful signs of regeneration, right
QUENTIN CHESTER



BY GRAHAM READFEARN

The aftermath

31 July 2020 The Guardian Weekly

pressreader

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Nightcap national park

There is a misty spot by a creek, at the bottom of a valley in a perennially damp patch of ancient rainforest, where you can travel millions of years into the past without needing a time machine.



We are in Nightcap national park, in the Gondwana forests, on the southern flanks of a volcano that erupted 23m years ago. It has long been swamped with the deep greens of an understory layer watched over by trees more than two metres in diameter and 50 metres tall.

This is where ecologist Robert Kooyman first returned once the fires were out and the flames had licked the thin barks of these ancient trees.

Now, pink ribbons and stakes mark out observation plots where Kooyman is recording the forest's every move - from changes in the leaf litter to every new shoot or dying tree.

As he moves through the burnt forest, there are charcoal chunks underfoot and crisp brown leaves hanging on to dead branches. As he walks from burned to unburned, he is struck again by the "incredible complexity of greens and how alive everything is".

The evolutionary lines of the plants here are measured in tens of millions of years. They are not evolved to burn.

"It's a deeply emotional and visceral thing," Kooyman says. "You can't spend four decades in a place and know individual trees and then not be moved. "There have been a lot of moments like that."

About a quarter of Kooyman's beloved Nightcap national park, in the world-heritage listed Gondwana rainforests of northern New South Wales, was razed in November 2019.

A week or so after the fires had burned out in February, with trunks still smouldering, Kooyman headed for that misty spot in the park where he stands today. Back in 1988, the botanist had knelt down to pick up some leaves he didn't recognise - and in the process discovered a new species that became known as the Nightcap oak.

Like much of the flora in this remnant patch of rainforest, the Nightcap oak has barely evolved since Australia and Antarctica parted from the supercontinent called Gondwana about 40 million years ago. Its ancestors go back another 30 million years.

Unlike Australia's eucalyptus trees, these rainforest species have not adapted to tolerate fire. "The heat breaks and splits the bark and induces mortality and serious injury," says Kooyman.

A fire in an ancient rainforest doesn't just take out trees that are hundreds of years old that in turn sprouted from trees that took root 10,000 or so years before. It also opens the dense canopy that keeps other non-rainforest species out, and threatens one of the last remaining vestiges of the Earth's ancient supercontinent.

"This is one of the greatest survival stories in biological history anywhere on the planet," says Kooyman. "What we have at risk is 70m years of deep time history and 40m years of isolated Australian history and its connections with Antarctica."

▼ Ecologist Robert Kooyman stands next to an endangered Nightcap oak

NATALIE GRONO

As Australia drifted away from Antarctica, that continent lost its flora. Another chunk drifted to South America. In Patagonia, scientists are finding 52m-year-old fossils in layers of volcanic ash that are near identical to the species in Australia's Gondwana rainforests.



'It's a deeply emotional and visceral thing. You can't spend four decades in a place and not be moved'



NATALIE GRONO

"We've lost hundreds of years of forest growth," he says.

There are 40 reserves that make up the world heritage-listed Gondwana rainforest area. More than half of them burned in the latest fires.

Last year was Australia's driest and hottest on record, with temperatures 1.52C above average across the continent. In the state of New South Wales, temperatures were 1.95C above average. While official records go back to 1910, studies suggest the continent has not been this hot for at least 1,000 years.

But it is precisely that burning of ancient fossilised plants that is driving the more intense and increasingly frequent bushfires that are killing Australia's wildlife.

About five hours' drive south of Nightcap national park is Port Macquarie, where Cheyne Flanagan is clinical director in the town's famous koala hospital. Scores of koalas were treated for burns during the fires.



The Port Macquarie area is a koala stronghold in New South Wales, but their numbers have dropped by about two-thirds in the past 20 years because of land clearing, habitat fragmentation, disease and now fire. More than 6,000 of the state's koalas died in the fires. Tragically few could be saved in facilities such as Flanagan's.

The chaos that engulfed the hospital in October last year - with vets, volunteers and media scrambling for space - has now passed. An initial A\$25,000 (\$18,000) crowdfunding goal to buy watering stations for koalas was quickly oversubscribed. Now the hospital is planning new research and breeding facilities with the A\$7.5m that eventually came in.

Just before Easter, with coronavirus restrictions starting to tighten, the hospital realised it wouldn't have enough people to care for the koalas that were left, so plans were drawn up to release 26 into two nature reserves. Plans to get permits to fit radio collars were dropped. Time had run out.

“It looked bloody awful,” says Flanagan. “Trees that should have been 20 or 30 metres tall were two or three metres – just little sticks. There’s no way we could have released koalas there. There was not enough to sustain one koala on that site.”

"Unless we address our changing climate and what we're doing to it, then we will revisit this scenario again. End of story," says Flanagan.



NATHAN EDWARDS/GETTY

31 July 2020 **The Guardian Weekly**

▼ The Macquarie perch is nowhere to be seen in the Cotter

MARK LINTERMAN

▼▼ Bob Semmons checks for birds near Mallacoota

RACHEL MOUNSEY

The Cotter river

Mark Lintermans knows a place that used to be well away from most humans. Only dedicated hikers would drift through this spot in Namadgi national park before it became a favourite of mountain bikers.



The Cotter is the main source of water for Australia's capital, Canberra. Upstream of the dams, the cobble-bottomed river is usually crystal clear. About 15 metres across at its widest, there are ankle-deep spots "you can jump across".

Lintermans, of the University of Canberra, has been coming to this 20km stretch of river since the mid-80s, relocating threatened native species such as blackfish and Macquarie perch.

"It's back country and it's beautiful. There are these little huts scattered around. I'd sit in this place called Cotter's hut - on a kangaroo-skin rug - and just listen to the dingoes howl. It was magical. It's like a part of my family. I'll go there until I can go there no more," he says.

Lintermans' experience of the area was changed in 2013 not by mountain bikers, but by flames. A major bushfire ripped through subalpine grasslands, woods and forests. At the time, it was described as a "once in a lifetime fire". "Then we had another one," he says.

In late January this year, the heat from a military helicopter's landing lamp was all it took to light tinder-dry grass that became the Orroral Valley fire. It burned across 865 sq km for a month, leaving just 20% of Namadgi national park untouched.

Rivers don't escape bushfires. The fires leave layers of ash and baked soil and when it rains there is little vegetation left to stop the sludge running into the river. All that extra nutrient causes bacteria to grow, which in turn deoxygenates the water. Fish suffocate. Across the east of Australia, anywhere a river ran through a scorched area, a similar chain of events unfolded.

"I knew as soon as we had heavy rain the river was being hammered by ash and erosion," says Lintermans.

Since the fire went out, he has been back four times. There are little shoots of green in the woodlands, though most of the canopy is gone. But what of the river's stony bottom and deep pools - the places where native fish feed?

"When you get in, you sink in black ooze. It's like chocolate blancmange," he says.

The deeper pools in the river are now filled with silt. "That means the fish have lost their summer refuge. It can totally change the structure of the stream and some of that will stay there for decades."

Before the fires, the east of Australia had experienced one of the sharpest droughts in living memory. For the rivers, this meant stream flows were well down. For a river like the Cotter, broken up with dams, this meant fish populations were being isolated and left vulnerable.

Since 2006, Lintermans has been moving Macquarie perch into the Cotter river - up to 300 a year. "I can't find any sign of them now. I feel like I'm back to square one," he says.

While fires were burning, Lintermans was leading the effort to coordinate rescues of native fish. "We were going to lose species and if I didn't get it right, then there were going to be some fish that missed the boat," he says.



Mallacoota

"What sort of a world would it be without birds?" asks Bob Semmons, an 87-year-old retired park ranger. "If I look out of the window and they're not there, well ... the day would be a bit ordinary."



Semmons lives in Mallacoota, a town in Victoria's East Gippsland, about 230km south-east of the Cotter River, that was surrounded by fire on New Year's Eve 2019. Under a blood-orange daytime sky, hundreds of people fled to the beach.

Semmons has been doing bird surveys in the area for more than 30 years. When he heard there were birds washing up on the sand, he headed down. Among piles of washed-up blackened leaves he found about 30 different species - kookaburras, yellow-tailed cockatoos, rainbow lorikeets and gang-gang cockatoos among them.

"Talk about a sad sight. My eyes were a bit moist," he says. "There must have been thousands of birds burned in the fire but the ones on the beach didn't show any signs of being burned."

"They must have just been overcome by the heat and smoke and just dropped out of the sky. The little birds would have had real trouble. I saw some seagulls trying to swallow little dead thornbills."

About 10km north-east of Mallacoota, the heathland scrub that straddles the Victoria-New South Wales border is home to the endangered eastern bristlebird – one of just three key sites in Australia for the small ground-dwelling species. If fire took hold there, it would be dealt a devastating blow.

With this in mind, the government of Victoria hatched a plan with Zoos Victoria and university experts to capture about 15 of the birds. After weeks of planning, watching and waiting, a mission was launched in early February using a Singapore air force Chinook helicopter. It took a 250-tonne helicopter to save a 50-gram, pretty much flightless bird.

"It's not the usual way to start a field trip," says Mick Bramwell of Victoria's environment department, who helped coordinate the rescue mission.

As the Chinook followed the shoreline, he says there was a "vastness" of charred landscape covered in "black stalks" that used to be trees. In the end, the fire only skirted the edge of the rescue site. But on 28 February, just 5km away across the border in New South Wales, fire got into the nature reserve that supported about 200 other bristlebirds.

Today, Semmens has been out checking on the six habitats he has visited for decades. "I'm going to keep doing the surveys but at the moment they're showing a lot less birds. I was in one coast forest and didn't see or hear a single bird. Then I got into the burned heathland and I didn't see a bird there either."

That is in contrast to Mallacoota town centre, where birds are appearing in unusually high numbers, being fed by the locals.

Feeding birds isn't something Semmens usually does, but he has made an exception. "I've gone through 70kg of seeds," he says. "I think right now people appreciate having them [the birds] round their houses. They're colourful and they entertain you."

Kangaroo Island
The western side of Kangaroo Island is a biodiversity hotspot – a wilderness off the South Australian coast that is a smorgasbord of endangered species, some found nowhere else.



In January, fire blackened much of this side of the island. As many as 25,000 koalas perished and the habitats of a number of threatened species were ravaged.

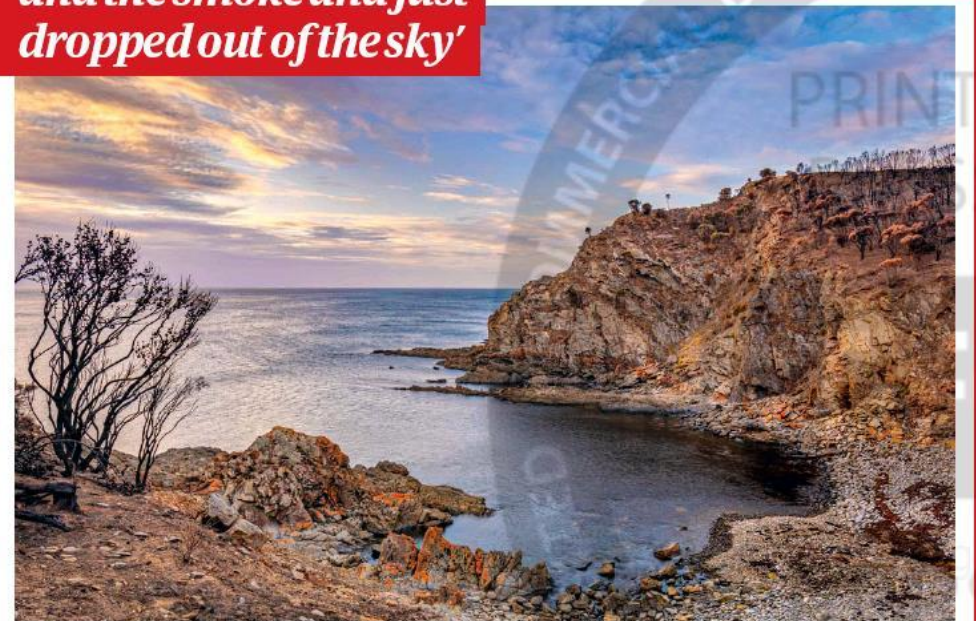
It's about a 50km drive west from Heidi Groffen and Pat Hodgens's place in Kingscote, Kangaroo Island's main town, to the De-Tong Ling Buddhist retreat centre.

"You just take a big deep breath when you get there and feel happy it didn't burn," Groffen says.

Some Buddhists will hide away and meditate for years at a time here. But now, the unburnt bush land that surrounds the centre and 10 nearby properties has become a retreat of a different kind.

"Every endangered species that we could have hoped for is still in

"They must have been overcome by the heat and the smoke and just dropped out of the sky"



▲ Kangaroo Island is a main habitat for the glossy black cockatoo

QUENTIN CHESTER

there," Hodgens says. "That means we have to throw everything at this patch of bush now."

Already, they've found Kangaroo Island dunnarts, Southern brown bandicoots, glossy black cockatoos, Kangaroo Island echidnas, heath goannas, southern emu wrens, Bassian thrush, western whipbirds and green carpenter bees.

Buddhist Kimball Cuddihy is the founder of the retreat. He says about 360 hectares of the site is "complete wilderness", untouched by human intervention except maybe for the "three times I've been lost in there".

Cuddihy and the retreat have welcomed Groffen and Hodgens, who run the not-for-profit Kangaroo Island Land for Wildlife.

"Whatever we can do, we'll do. When you're on an area of unburned land when so much else has been burned, this is our responsibility. We don't really have a choice. I know how much healing this place can bring."

Even before the fires, one of the biggest threats to Australia's native wildlife – especially small mammals and birds – were feral cats. Just like in other burned habitats around the country, these cats are now using the open ground as hunting arenas for survivors.

"They're relentless. They're moving across the burned landscape," says Hodgens. Inspections of the stomachs of euthanised cats reveals "they're eating a lot of small animals and birds".

Many places in the west are bursting with new green shoots but others are not faring so well. Groffen says one area they had worked in that runs up against Flinders Chase national park remains "like a moonscape" with no standing trees left. As if frozen, the bodies of kangaroos and wallabies are still attached to fences they ran into trying to escape the inferno.

Groffen swings between fatalism and optimism. "Even though the outcome might not be great, we know the work we're doing will protect other species, but there's always the risk that the genetic pool won't be big enough for another 30 or 40 years," she says.

"We don't know yet whether the damage has already been done, but we know we can prevent extinctions by reducing the threats. That's our drive to keep going."

GRAHAM READFEARN IS AN ENVIRONMENT REPORTER FOR GUARDIAN AUSTRALIA

► This rare glossy black cockatoo survived the conflagration

KRISTIAN BELL



Guardian Weekly

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Turned away by port after port, the passengers and crew on the MS Maasdam cruise ship endured a bizarre lockdown at sea. But what could have been a disaster turned into one of the last parties on Earth

By Sam Wollaston | Photographs by Jon Tonks

Cast adrift





The cruise ship MS Maasdam left New Zealand on the evening of 1 March, steaming out of Auckland's Waitemata harbour into the Hauraki Gulf, where it headed north. The route was to San Diego via Fiji, the Cook Islands, French Polynesia and Hawaii. On board the Holland America Line ship were around 1,200 passengers, including Americans, Britons, Canadians, Australians and French holidaymakers. The crew of 542 included Dutch, Americans, Germans, Venezuelans and Filipinos. There were also a handful of entertainers and guest lecturers along for the ride, including Jon Tonks, a portrait photographer from Bath, England, who ended up with a portrait of a cruise that didn't go to plan.

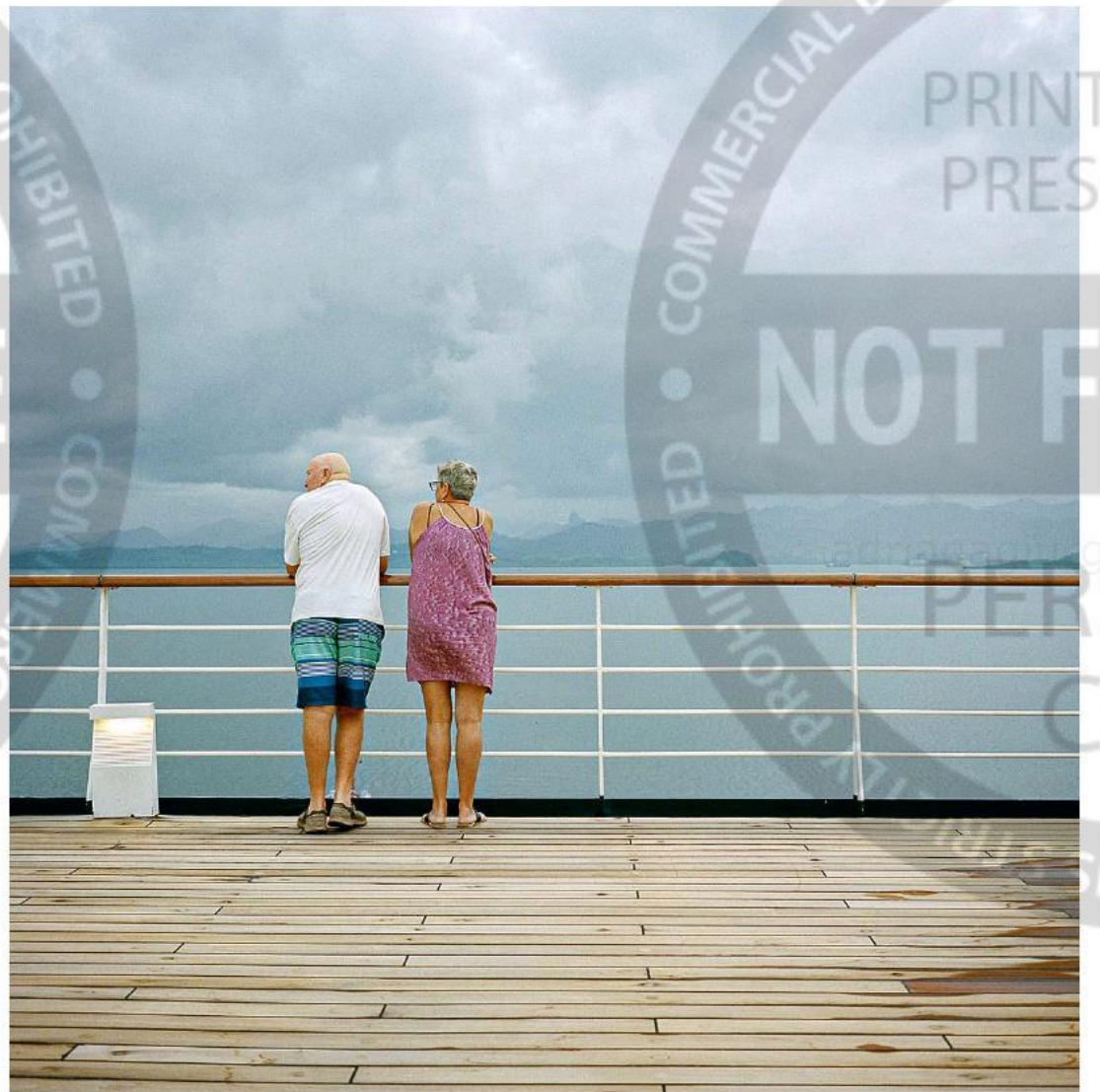
Covid-19 was certainly a thing at the beginning of March, but it was still considered mainly a China thing. The Maasdam wouldn't be going anywhere near China. Questionnaires were handed to passengers, about symptoms and where they'd been before, but then they were good to go. Still, Tonks says that friends had joked before he left: "Good luck on your corona cruise."

In some ways it did turn into a corona cruise, in that the virus was the major factor in what played out over the next month. No one on board got infected; this is not a story of passengers being locked in their cabins and the ship's morgue overflowing with corpses. But it will be some time before people gather en masse on a floating resort again.

To begin with, everything went to plan. "We had a full entertainment team, and the schedule all worked out for this beautiful journey," says cruise director Thomas Weber, speaking on the phone from Palm Springs, California. Weber, 50, had by then been working for seven months straight, and had had to be begged to do this one. "Little did I know it was going to be the most challenging contract I had taken so far."

Among that entertainment team was Adam Langstaff, 34, a drummer from Birmingham with onboard covers band the Runaround Kids, who mostly do 1950s and 60s rock'n'roll to cater for the tastes of the passengers, most of them in their 70s and 80s. Was there any dancing? "We always tried, but it was normally an uphill struggle - nobody has the guts to be the first," he says. But Langstaff was having a nice time in the South Pacific, enjoying the food, the friendly atmosphere and an undemanding workload.

There were lectures about the natural world, and Tonks gave his first photography talk, which went well. To his surprise, his former religious studies teacher was in the crowd. Terri Shanks, 49, from Worthing, was travelling with her 12-year-old son Cameron, whom she had taken out of school to "world-school". Her grown-up daughter



kept them up to date with life at home, sending pictures of supermarkets stripped bare and people fighting over toilet paper. "It was surreal. We stepped on in Auckland, in a normal world, and 28 days later stepped off in San Diego, into this global apocalypse. The whole world had changed in those four weeks."

Hygiene rules got stricter as the cruise progressed, with more frequent and visible cleaning. Crew members started standing by the hand sanitiser stations, to make sure passengers used them.

The Maasdam stopped further along the coast of New Zealand's North Island, and in Fiji, and then the problems began. Tonga wasn't going to let them in, for fear of letting the virus in, too. Weber was sympathetic. "You live on an island in the middle of nowhere with no cases: I 100% understand."

But it was becoming harder for him to go on stage to introduce a comedy show, when the audience had just been told that their next stop had been cancelled and that they faced several days at sea. Weber found that getting up there with a martini in his hand helped lighten the mood. The passenger questions in the regular Q&A sessions with the captain were suddenly all along the lines of: is there coronavirus aboard? And: where the hell are we getting off this ship?

Most passengers were understanding, with a small minority up in arms. Tonks remembers a group of young Americans, who had been looking forward to a diving excursion somewhere. "They sat at the bar, smashing margaritas all day, getting progressively more drunk and irate. I remember one of them saying, 'You're using a pandemic as an excuse!'"

Then Rarotonga in the Cook Islands let the Maasdam in. Passengers could take one of the

▲ All at sea

Ports on the ship's route from Auckland to San Diego banned disembarkation

◀ Life of leisure

With no infection on board, passengers could go swimming and do other activities that were gradually shutting down on land for fear of the virus spreading



◀ **Paddle bored**
With little else to do, guests discuss an uncertain voyage during one of the Maasdam's last scheduled stops off Dravuni Island in Fiji

tenders ashore for a day's sightseeing, before returning to the ship. Next stop: Tahiti, where several passengers and entertainers, including Tonks and the Runaround Kids, were due to disembark. But there was bad news that evening: Tahiti wouldn't have them, either. The Maasdam sailed on into a fog of uncertainty.

Tonks tells me he thinks people go on cruises to see the world, but also to be institutionalised. "When that comfort blanket was removed, they didn't know what to do." He was with a group at the bar, staring into their phones, trying to work out which way they were heading: was it west, back to New Zealand? Or east, to America? "It took a while to realise we were going round in circles." The captain was figuring out what to do, as well as trying to negotiate with ports to allow them entry. In the end, the Maasdam returned to anchor off Rarotonga, for further uncertainty, and for passengers to do more staring into their phones, trying to find out what was going on - here, at home, in the world.

For Dave Morin, 79, on the cruise of a lifetime with his

wife Vicki, the main worry was the family wedding venue business back home in Massachusetts. "I was getting a lot of panicky phone calls: brides concerned about what was going to happen with their weddings." He didn't mind about extending the cruise. "I can think of a lot worse places to be held hostage. While we were on the ship, we had three good meals a day and got to play bingo, and see shows at night and sunbathe on the back deck."

Other passengers were worried about their medication running out. But they were only allowed to disembark at Rarotonga if they could get an air ticket out, so there was a rush - on the boat's sketchy wifi - to buy flights. Tonks managed to get one back to Auckland, from where he'd get another to London. He was on the last tender ashore before the ship departed again, this time for Hawaii, 4,500km away.

He remembers watching from the shore until the Maasdam was a dot on the horizon, with mixed emotions. "Part of me thinks I should have stayed. I went from being

We were some of the luckiest people in the world in our little bubble

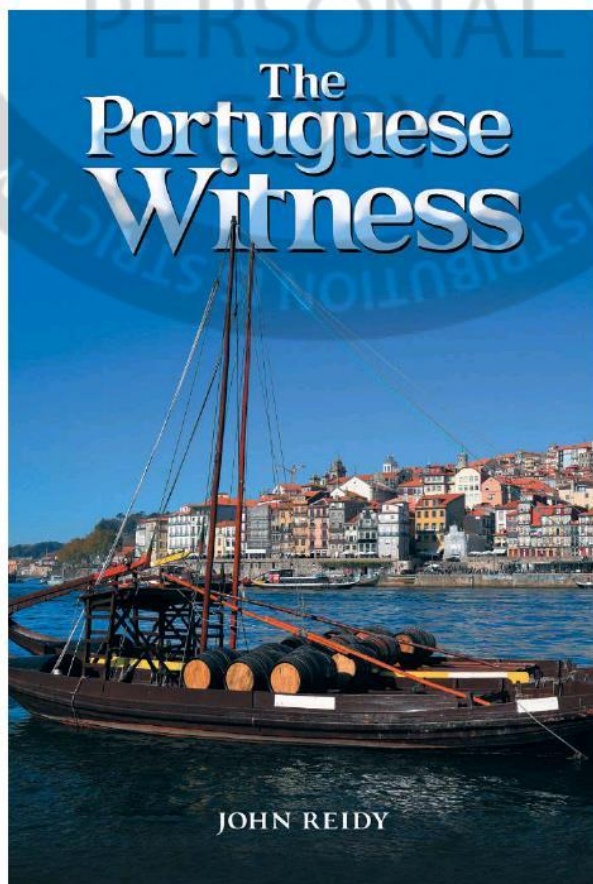
It took a while to realise we were going round in circles

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The planet
can't return
to 'normal'

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Opinion



SOCIAL MEDIA

*If Facebook doesn't terrify you,
you haven't been paying attention*

Carole Cadwalladr



31 July 2020 The Guardian Weekly

pressreader

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In 2016, we didn't know. We were innocent. We still believed social media connected us and that connections were good. That technology equalled progress. And progress equalled better. Four years on, we know too much. And yet, it turns out, we understand nothing. We know social media is a bin fire and that the world is burning. But it's like the pandemic. We understand in outline how bad things *could* get. But we remain hopelessly human. Relentlessly optimistic. Of course, we believe there'll be a vaccine. Because there has to be, doesn't there?

In Facebook's case, the worst has already happened. We've just failed to acknowledge it. Failed to reckon with it. And there's no vaccine coming to the rescue. In 2016 everything changed. As for 2020 ... well, we will see.

We have already been through the equivalent of a social media pandemic - an unstoppable contagion that has sickened our information space, infected our public discourse, silently subverted our electoral systems. It's no longer about *if* this will happen all over again. The question is whether our political systems, society, democracy, can survive the age of Facebook.

We are already through the looking glass. In 2016, a hostile foreign government used Facebook to systematically undermine an American election. Nobody has ever been held to account.

Mark Zuckerberg says Black Lives Matter and yet we know Donald Trump used Facebook's tools to deliberately suppress and deny black and Latino people the vote. With no consequences. We know the name "Cambridge Analytica" and were momentarily outraged by Facebook's complicity in allowing 87 million people's personal data to be stolen and repurposed, including by the Trump campaign. A \$5bn fine was paid but no individuals were held to account.

And that's just in America. For Britain, there's an even bigger reckoning that has not come. If it wasn't for Facebook, there would be no Brexit. The future of Britain has been set on its course by a foreign company that is beyond the rule of parliament.

Who in Britain understands that? Almost no one. Parliament's intelligence and security committee, perhaps, who reported their astonishment last week that no attempt had been made to investigate foreign interference in the EU referendum.

Dominic Cummings understands the role that Facebook played in Brexit. He wrote about it. In excruciating Cummings detail. He described the deliberate use of misinformation targeted at unknown

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*If it wasn't for Facebook
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been set on its course by
a foreign company*

individuals in an election operation the scale of which had never been seen before. He deployed more than a billion Facebook ads, he says. At pennies per view.

The fact is that we now know how the platform was systematically abused by the Leave campaigns. We know that loopholes in our laws were deliberately exploited. And we know that these actions were proved to be illegal and "punished" by "regulators" whose "regulations" have been exposed to be not worth the paper they are written on.

Will Facebook be used to subvert the 2020 US presidential election? Yes.

Will Facebook be held to account? No. Are we looking at a system shock that will change America for ever? Yes. Because Trump will either win this election using Facebook or he will lose it using Facebook. Both ways spell disaster. Trump has refused to say if he would leave the White House if he lost.

The idea of America is on the brink. And at the cold, dead heart of the suicide mission it has set itself on, is Facebook. Facebook and America are now indivisible. Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, these are the bloodstream of American life. A bloodstream that is sick.

And so the world is sick, because American capitalism has been the vector that has brought this infection across the globe. Algorithmically amplified "free speech" with no consequences. Lies spread at speed. Hate freely expressed, freely shared. Ethnic hatred, white supremacy, resurgent Nazism all spreading invisibly, by stealth beyond the naked eye.

For Trump 2020, the band is back together. The chief data scientist of Cambridge Analytica, Matt Oczkowski, has launched a new firm, Data Propria, which is working with the digital director of Trump's 2016 campaign, Brad Parscale. And Trump is testing his limits. Can he place ads that feature Nazi symbols? Yes. Can he spread lies about mail-in fraud? Yes. Can he threaten Black Lives Matter protesters with violence? Yes. Will he be able to use Facebook to dispute the election? Watch this space.

In a world without consequences, the bad man will be king. And an aggressive multinational company whose business model is threatened by the bad man's opponent is, at best, conflicted; at worst, complicit.

Last week, Zuckerberg was forced to deny he had a "secret deal" with Trump. "A ridiculous idea," he said. It was an uncanny echo of the "pretty crazy idea" he cited in November 2016 when it was first suggested fake news on Facebook might have played a role in electing Trump.

It wasn't crazy. It was true. We know this because of the work the FBI and congressional committees did in investigating foreign interference in the US election. Work that hasn't even been begun in the UK.

Facebook is at the centre of this too. It's Facebook that enables hostile nation states such as Russia to attack us in our homes. A geopolitical war being fought in front of our noses, in our pockets, on our phones.

This is Facebook's world now. And we live in it. And if you're not terrified about what this means it's because you haven't been paying attention ● *Observer*

✳ **Carole Cadwalladr** is a reporter and feature writer for the *Observer*

CLIMATE

The old 'normal' was madness – we must not return to it

George Monbiot



Out there somewhere, marked on no map but tantalisingly near, is a promised land called Normal, to which one day we can return. This is the magical geography we are taught by politicians such as Boris Johnson, with his “significant return to normality”. It is the story we tell ourselves, even if we contradict it with the very next thought.

There are practical reasons to believe that Normal is a fairyland to which we can never return. The virus has not gone away, and is likely to keep recurring in waves. But let's focus on another question: if such a land existed, would we want to live there?

The polls consistently suggest we would not. A survey by BritainThinks this month found that only 12% of people want life to be “exactly as it was before”. A poll at the end of June, commissioned by the nursery provider Bright Horizons, suggested that just 13% of people want to return to working as they did before the lockdown. A YouGov study in the same week revealed that only 6% of us want the same type of economy as we had before the pandemic. Another survey by the same pollsters in April showed only 9% of respondents wanted a return to “normal”. It's rare to see such strong and consistent results on any major issue.

Of course, we would all like to leave the pandemic behind, with its devastating impacts on physical and mental health, its exacerbation of loneliness, the lack

of schooling and the collapse in employment. But this doesn't mean that we want to return to the bizarre and frightening world the government defines as normal. Ours was no land of lost content, but a place in which lethal crises were gathering long before the pandemic struck. Alongside our many political and economic dysfunctions, normality meant accelerating the strangest and deepest predicament humankind has ever confronted: the collapse of our life-support systems.

Last month, confined to our homes, we watched columns of smoke rising from the Arctic, where temperatures reached a highly abnormal 38C. Such apocalyptic imagery is becoming the backdrop to our lives. We scroll past images of fire consuming Australia, California, Brazil, Indonesia, inadvertently normalising them. In a brilliant essay at the beginning of this year, the author Mark O'Connell described this process as “the slow atrophying of our moral imaginations”. We are acclimatising ourselves to our existential crisis.

When business as usual resumes, so does the air pollution that kills more people every year than Covid-19 has yet done, and exacerbates the impacts of the virus. Climate breakdown and air pollution are two aspects of a wider dysbiosis: the unravelling of ecosystems. The term is used by doctors to describe

***George Monbiot is a Guardian columnist**

the collapse of our gut biomes, but it is equally applicable to all living systems: rainforests, coral reefs, rivers, soil. They are unspooling at shocking speed due to the cumulative effect of “normality”, which entails a

perpetual expansion of consumption.

This month we learned that \$10bn-worth of precious metals, such as gold and platinum, are dumped in landfill every year, embedded in tens of millions of tonnes of lesser materials, in the form of electronic waste. The world's production of e-waste is rising by 4% a year. It is driven by another outlandish norm: planned obsolescence. Our appliances are designed to break down; they are engineered not to be repaired. This is one of the reasons why the average smartphone, containing precious materials extracted at great environmental cost, lasts between two and three years.

The living world, and the people it supports, cannot sustain this level of consumption, but normal life depends on it. The compound, cascading effects of dysbiosis push us towards what some scientists warn could be global systemic collapse.

The polls on this issue are also clear: we do not want to return to this madness. By and large, the poorer the nation, the greater the weight its people give to environmental issues. The more we consume, the more our moral imagination atrophies. But government is determined to shove us back into hypernormality regardless of our wishes.

Just as there has never been a normal person, there has never been a normal time. Normality is a concept used to limit our moral imaginations. There is no normal to which we can return, or should wish to return.

We live in abnormal times. They demand an abnormal response ●

Illustration R Fresson

31 July 2020 The Guardian Weekly



RACISM

America's dark side will plague the nation after Trump is gone

Nesrine Malik

If Donald Trump loses in November - and it's a very big if, of course - then under Joe Biden, it will be hard for the United States not to be seduced into collective amnesia. The Trump presidency has represented such a thorough subversion of political norms that, with a Biden victory, the temptation to move on from it as swiftly as possible will be strong.

Already the signs are beginning to appear. The polls look encouraging for the Democrats: coronavirus is ravaging the country and Trump is unravelling a little more every day as he tries, and fails, to prove that he is "cognitively there" in TV interviews.

The temptation is to indulge in a sort of fast-

forwarding to the future, where Trump is a blip, the first and last of his kind. In a town hall meeting last week, Biden said: "We've had racists, and they've existed, they've tried to get elected president. He's the first one that has."

But 12 presidents owned slaves. Others presided over segregation. Biden's disavowal of racism in the most powerful office of the land is a piece of ahistoricism brought on by the need to believe that Trump is a singular monstrosity.

The idea is that his toxicity can be cleansed with his ejection from the White House.

This reassurance is, after all, what Biden is there for. His weakness as a Democratic candidate has turned into a strength in a period of heightened uncertainty.

Here is a pastoral, non-controversial figure, who will not subject a traumatised country to any more sudden shocks.

The purpose of his presidency would be to return the US back to "normal". Trump was just a long, vivid nightmare. Chroniclers of the US's journey are already preparing to write this account of a country that can be managed back to health.

The Johns Hopkins University professor Yascha Mounk tweeted that if the current polls hold and "Biden crushes Trump", then "a lot of people are gonna have

Illustration Chris Riddell

to change their narrative about America quite a lot". He concluded that they probably wouldn't, all the same.

Nor should they. The conditions that brought Trump to power and kept his poll ratings pretty much level throughout allegations of sexual assault, impeachment and indulgence of white supremacy will not have disappeared overnight.

And even though Trump's departure, whenever it happens, will be enormously welcome, he did at least force a moment of national self-confrontation. He revealed that white supremacy is always waiting in the wings, ready to be emboldened.

He revealed the extent to which many Americans don't care about morality in foreign policy. He took Russia's word about its interference over that of his own intelligence agencies - and in getting away with it, showed that his supporters' xenophobia was more powerful than their patriotism.

As long as he was dogwhistling against black people, Mexicans and Muslims, his betrayals would be forgiven. These are painful things to acknowledge.

They run so contrary to the foundational myth of America, to its comforting rhetoric and its political sacraments, that the business of trivialising them must begin at once if the country is to heal after Trump goes.

Getting back to normal after periods of abject moral failure is one of the US's strengths. When the Senate select committee on intelligence released its damning report on the CIA's "enhanced interrogation" programme, concluding that the CIA avoided oversight and lied about the efficacy of torture, there was no punishment for anyone involved. The programme, during which one detainee died of hypothermia and another lost an eye, was "troubling", according to Barack Obama.

The report was even presented as evidence that the US's ideals were intact. "No nation is perfect," Obama said, "but one of the strengths that makes America exceptional is our willingness to openly confront our past, face our imperfections, make changes and do better."

The same will happen if Trump loses later this year. An image-laundering exercise, where the US will appoint itself as judge and jury, but no sentence will be meted out. It will investigate his time in office, soberly declare that failures happen, then pat itself on the back for rejecting him.

In 2016, it was a challenge to accept that Trump won for any reason other than the economic disaffection of rust-belt voters.

Just as this "calamity thesis" dominated the aftermath of Trump's victory, the idea that he is simply an anomaly will carry the day if he loses.

But Trump is a culmination, not an aberration. The point in hoping the US doesn't move on too quickly isn't to self-flagellate.

If there is no reckoning with what this presidency says about the country, then another version of him, and all the dark forces that he unleashed, will be back in short order ●

The moral case is clear: the world must act to save Uighurs from persecution

It has taken too many horrors, but at last the world is paying heed to China's treatment of the Uighurs. Satellite pictures of detention camps, and procurement requests for spiked clubs, have been supplemented by leaked internal documents warning "allow no escapes", and growing testimony from relatives and former inmates whose desperation has overcome their fear of retaliation for speaking out.

What once, perhaps, seemed remote and opaque to those in other countries has become much more immediate. The crackdown in Hong Kong, taking place in the public eye, has highlighted the ruthlessness of the Communist party's response to perceived challenges. Reports of the forced use of IUDs, sterilisation and abortion suggests a campaign to slash birthrates among Uighurs and other minorities, which some experts have described as "demographic genocide". Last week a coalition of rights groups warned that virtually the entire fashion industry is complicit in abuses, due to the use of forced labour in Xinjiang's mammoth cotton industry. It is harder to turn your back on people who made the shirt upon it.

An estimated million or more Uighurs, and other Turkic Muslims, have been held in the camps for the most moderate expressions of religious belief, having relatives abroad or even failing to pay bills. Former inmates describe political indoctrination and abuses ranging from being forced to eat pork to rape and torture.

Though some have been released, others have been sentenced to long prison terms or transferred to factories as forced labour. Those outside dwell in a digital gulag, under relentless hi-tech and human surveillance. China, which initially denied the camps' existence, now says they are vocational centres to re-educate those "infected" by extremism and terrorism - a necessary deradicalisation campaign following violent attacks. Yet its approach in the region amounts to treating Uighurs and their way of life as fundamentally suspect. Almost any expression of Uighur culture, bar singing and dancing, is regarded as threatening - and thus in need of eradication.

The US has already blacklisted companies and institutions it believes are involved in human rights violations in the region. But though Donald Trump has now signed a law calling for sanctions against officials responsible for violation, he reportedly told Xi Jinping that the detention camps were "exactly the right thing to do". The administration's cynicism is not an excuse for others to dodge the issue.

Pressure should also be exerted on companies doing business in the region. The coalition that issued last week's warning on the fashion industry is urging governments to strengthen laws banning trade in goods produced using forced labour, and to require human rights due diligence in supply chains. But consumers can play their part too. The moral case needs no debate. Uighurs can wait no longer ●

**Another worst-case scenario looms for US**

In your 24 July issue, Jonathan Freedland outlines an entirely plausible worst-case scenario for the November 2020 presidential election in the United States. It is even more plausible than he realises.

A huge proportion of the votes will be cast by mail because of concern over the coronavirus pandemic. Ordinarily, contrary to what Freedland writes, mail-in balloting does not favour either party. But if many Republicans are still in denial about the pandemic in November, they may be more likely than Democrats to vote in person.

It will take many days, even weeks, after election day to count the enormous piles of mail-in ballots, and if the count on election night in the large swing states gives Republicans a majority, Republican state officials could refuse to count the mail-in ballots on the theory that most are likely to be fraudulent.

That way, they could certify enough of Trump's electors to give him 270 votes for a victory in the Electoral College, with no vote in the House of Representatives needed. *Homer E Price, Sylva, North Carolina, US*

Just put your money where your mouth is

Your Global report tells us that 83 of the world's richest people have called on their governments to, "raise taxes on people like us. Immediately. Substantially. Permanently." (17 July).

No doubt, they demonstrated commitment to their goal



BERGER & WYSE

of "healing our world" by each attaching a receipt for their initial \$1bn voluntary tax contribution. Leading from the front, so to speak.

Or perhaps there was no evidence of such payments? Or, maybe, they really are telling us such taxes should be on people like them, rather than on themselves!

Like my old Grandma used to say, "Take no notice of what a man say - see what he do."

Allan Portis, Dunedin, New Zealand

Population shortage is not a likely possibility

I take exception to Linda Scott's comment about the concern about the "danger of soon having too few births to sustain their populations" (The great divide, 17 July), and her concern over ageing populations. The population of the world is generally acknowledged to be well above its capacity to sustain it and a reduction in population, or at least to limit its growth,

should be considered as a key component in our challenge to constrain climate change.

I am proud of my daughter deciding not to have children for this reason, though sorry not to have grandchildren. Of course the ageing population needs to be looked after, but the cost of their care is less than that of looking after and educating children.

There is also a big issue about who is economically responsible. Parents are generally expected to care for their children, but responsibilities for looking after the elderly are less clear and the costs are so variable that some public support is essential. *Keith Hitchcock, Sutton Coldfield, UK*

Will Covid-19 vaccine really protect people?

Your article, Could immunity to Covid-19 be lost in months? (17 July), raises fears for the efficacy of a Covid-19 vaccine, based on the observation of declining antibody

levels against the virus after infection.

However, the measure of protection from a vaccination is the speed and higher levels of activity of the immune response when exposed to an infectious agent for a second time.

This secondary response is faster and greater, and produces more specific antibodies than the first response due to long lived "memory" lymphocytes, which develop as a response to the first exposure.

The question of the efficacy of the immune response to a second exposure to Covid-19 awaits research in which subjects are actually exposed to Covid-19 for a second time.

Gerhard Saueracker, Perth, Western Australia

A note on how we talk about Srebrenica

The Oxford Shorter Dictionary defines execution as "...capital punishment in pursuance of a judicial sentence..."

By saying that Bosnian Serb forces "...executed more than 7,000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys..." Serge Brammertz (17 July) bestows on this horrifying mass extermination a semblance of legality.

There was nothing legal about this genocidal act; this was murder on a horrific scale, not execution.

Ian Brown, Sandringham, Victoria, Australia

CORRECTIONS

A Global report (24 July) stated that Khabarovsk in eastern Russia is 1,000km from Moscow. The correct distance is 6,100km.

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BOOKS

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loathing in
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Culture

A SUITABLE ADAPTATION

The new six-part adaptation of Vikram Seth's enormous novel *A Suitable Boy* is the BBC's first period drama series that features no white actors



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Culture Television

By Ammar Kalia
COVER
PHOTOGRAPH
Ishaan Nair

This is an Indian story," says Tanya Maniktala, "so it's about time it was told by us." The 22-year-old actor is speaking by video call from Delhi about playing the lead in a groundbreaking BBC adaptation of Vikram Seth's novel *A Suitable Boy*.

The six-part series is the first time the BBC has had a historical drama cast entirely with people of colour, and the first time that Seth's 1993 novel – one of the longest in the English language – has been adapted for the screen. "It's a landmark," says BBC commissioning editor Mona Qureshi. "With a novel like this, where there aren't characters who are white, it makes sense to have an all south Asian cast. It has been a long time coming."

A Suitable Boy is set in 1951, against the backdrop of a newly independent and post-partition India. It tells the story of 19-year-old Hindu Lata, played by Maniktala (pictured on cover), who is under pressure from her widowed mother to find an appropriate husband. A chance encounter with the Muslim boy Kabir sees Lata fall in love, but their religious differences echo the wider clashes between Hindus and Muslims in the country. When Lata's mother learns of their affair, the relationship is forbidden. There follows a vast, intergenerational coming-of-age story, involving four families and more than 110 characters over the course of 18 months, right across India. It is a grandiose reflection of a nation coming to terms with a new identity.

The series was three years in the making, Seth having agreed to the series on condition that Andrew Davies – who has adapted everything from *Pride and Prejudice* to *War and Peace* – was at the helm. It was clear to director

Mira Nair from the outset that the show had to be played by south Asians and filmed in India. "I never subscribe to making films that exoticise India," Nair says. "So we had to shoot on location, to recreate this atmosphere of crumbling aristocracy, rather than spiffing it up."

Nair, who was the first woman to win the Golden Lion at the Venice film festival with her 2001 film *Monsoon Wedding*, says her own childhood mirrors Lata's. "I grew up in these bungalows as a daughter of a civil servant, just after this time when the country found its voice in freedom."

This interpretation of Seth's world interweaves romanticised scenes of the misty Ganges at dawn with bustling, dusty markets, the decaying Raj, and westernisation creeping into dress and music. We witness the placid natural beauty of northern India, as Lata secretly meets with Kabir in the opening of the second episode while, conversely, her Anglicised older brother puts on a double-breasted suit for an alcohol-fuelled evening of jazz dancing in the metropolis of what is now Kolkata.

All the while, the seeds of Hindu nationalism grow as temples are erected next to centuries-old mosques and peaceful protest descends into police violence. Despite being set almost 70 years ago, it is a context that worryingly reflects current Indian prime minister Narendra Modi's fierce nationalism and stoking of religious violence.

"The seeds of much of what we are facing today were planted in the 1950s," Nair says. "Vikram's story drew on his own time of writing, the 1990s, just as we do with this adaptation today. For instance, the Hindu temple that is being built next to the mosque in the first episode is based on the destruction of the Babri Masjid mosque in 1992. What we are living through has a history, so this show is not a museum piece in any way." This is most powerfully

▲ **Grand scenes**
More than 110 characters appear in the adaption of what may be the longest book in the English language

TAHA AHMAD/BBC/
LOOKOUT POINT

expressed in a scene where local Muslims march at a temple – and police respond by opening fire on the crowd. Their bodies are left in the street to be recovered by their families.

Even for Maniktala, there are parallels between her life now and her character's. "I felt there was so much in common with me and Lata," she says. "A mother trying to find a suitable boy for her young daughter is something that still very much happens now, but I really like Lata because she wants to be valued as an individual, rather than be the shadow of someone else. She isn't afraid to make mistakes, which I am still learning from. She can handle being judged."

Before she was cast, Maniktala was working as an advertising copywriter. After being spotted by a casting director, she was called in for a Skype interview with Nair. "I had been looking for my Lata for a year and must have seen over 500 people," says Nair. "Then I saw a grainy tape of this girl with dark circles under her eyes and I was immediately drawn in. Tanya is amazing because she has a kind of sweetness, as if she has not been fettered by the world. She's truly at the brink of growing up, which is a really unusual quality in a young person in the 21st century."

Contrasting Lata's innocence is the world-weary and self-assured courtesan Saeeda, played by Bollywood veteran Tabu. "Saeeda represents this bridge between the crumbling world of the Raj and modernity," she says. "It felt so important to be playing this complex and powerful female role – someone who is all over the place emotionally, spiritually and sexually, who depends on male patronage to live but who also has such an independent mind and a rich knowledge of life. We are all products of our environment and although Saeeda represents a dying profession, she just wants a better life like so many today."

One aspect of the show that is certainly new is its casting. In the wake of global Black Lives Matter protests following the police killing of George Floyd in Minnesota in May, there has been a re-evaluation of the representation of people of colour on screen. Blackface-referencing shows such as *Little Britain* have been pulled from streaming services, white actors have stopped voicing black characters on certain animations, and in June the director Steve McQueen called the British TV and film industry a whitewashed product of "blatant racism".

Qureshi feels that a newfound openness from audiences will help push through more diversity. "Audiences are really open to following stories with new faces and our palates have become increasingly sophisticated," she says. "I genuinely think that the industry is a very different place to when I started in the mid-90s. Then I might have agreed with Steve McQueen's sentiment, but we're working towards diversity being represented across a range of genres now and that's the most crucial element. This show is just the start."

She mentions the casting of mixed-race actor Vinette Robinson in 2019's BBC adaptation of *A Christmas Carol* as a step in the right direction, even though it did prompt a backlash. Yet for some, such as writer Nikesh Shukla, despite

the direction of Nair and the cast, having a white writer at the helm remains a "slap in the face", as he wrote on Twitter. Perhaps meaningful change can only come with unimpeded opportunity and representation.

As a director who has championed challenging, diasporic narratives throughout her 30-year career, Nair does not see *A Suitable Boy* as a milestone. "When people say the casting of the show is radical, it's only radical to you guys," she says. "It's about time that this western world understands that we have extraordinary talent and that should be normalised."

Maniktala agrees. "Who can portray this story better than Indians who have grown up with those values and morals?" she says. "My grandfather, who was from what is now Pakistan, used to tell us stories about partition. So this history is close to us – it is something my family have experienced."

Ultimately, with over 110 actors in a production shot over three months on location, Nair's goal is for viewers to find themselves enveloped in the often conflicting worlds of India, rather than consuming the show as an inconsequential period piece. "We've taken great care to recreate the detail of these worlds which are rapidly changing," she says. "The Urdu language, which is currently being wiped out, is expressed in nuances by the ways in which the vendors in our fictional town of Bhrampur change their Urdu calls by season. Now, you might not get that but it all goes towards creating the extraordinary richness of the ever-changing subcontinent."

For those who do get it, there is a deeper message. "History repeats itself but we don't seem to learn from it," Maniktala says. "Perhaps this show will provide a new perspective, one for a new generation to take heed of. It is an Indian telling of our own story. Here, you'll view us as we are – and how we came to be." ●

A Suitable Boy is on BBC One in the UK and Netflix outside North America and China

AMMAR KALIA IS THE GUARDIAN'S ASSISTANT TV EDITOR AND GLOBAL MUSIC CRITIC



▲ **United**
Tabu as the courtesan Saeeda Bai with Ishaan Khatter

TAHA AHMAD/BBC/
LOOKOUT POINT

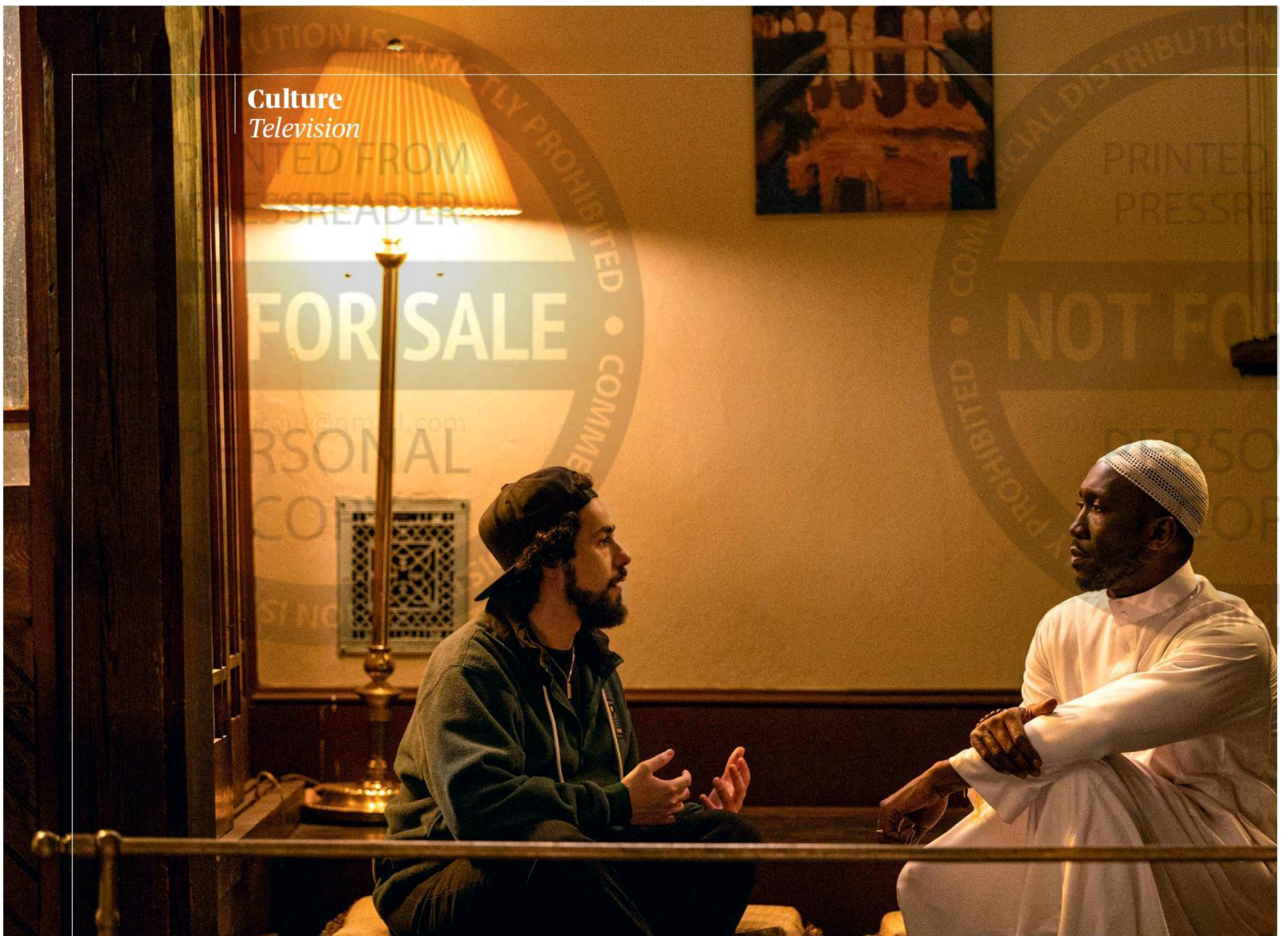
▼ **Divided**
Hindu Lata (Tanya Maniktala) falls for Muslim Kabir (Danesh Razvi)

APARNA JAYAKUMAR/
BBC/LOOKOUT POINT



What we are living through has a history, this show is not a museum piece

Culture
Television



REVEALING YOUR SIN

COMEDY

Ramy Youssef's Golden Globe-winning series considers what it takes to be a good Muslim in today's America

By Iman Amrani

Nuanced, funny and humanising, Ramy Youssef's eponymous TV show, *Ramy*, gets under the skin of his internal struggles as a young, second-generation Egyptian American, as he navigates what it means to be a good person and a good Muslim. It calls to mind series such as *Dave*, *I May Destroy You* or *Fleabag* - shows based on flawed but likable protagonists, addressing questions of morality for a millennial audience with humour and darkness. With a Golden Globe win earlier this year and season two guest-starring Oscar winner Mahershala Ali, momentum is building round both the man and the show.

Like TV *Ramy*, real-life Ramy grew up in New Jersey, visiting his grandparents in New York on weekends and spending his summers in Cairo. Real Ramy was into comedy and film-making as a hobby, but it was Laith Nakli (who plays Uncle Naseem in *Ramy*) who convinced him to seriously pursue acting when they met at a comedy festival more than 10 years ago. At 20, Youssef landed a job on a Nickelodeon sitcom and moved to LA, where he sold *Ramy* before he even had a standup special out.

The focus of the series is not just Ramy. Some of the most groundbreaking episodes are when the lens focuses on the other members

MARVIN JOSEPH/WASHINGTON POST/GETTY; CRAIG BLANKENHORN/HULU



▲ **Divine collaboration**
Youssef with Mahershala Ali as Sheikh Ali Malik

Middle Eastern viewers get that we're skipping the entry-level conversations

of his family. Each is viewed with affection, but none are without their sometimes infuriating flaws. Ramy's father defines himself by his work and struggles when he loses his job, while his chauvinistic brother-in-law, Naseem, is a successful businessman. Best of all is his neurotic mother (Succession's Hiam Abbass) whose unsolicited advice and objectionable opinions are reminiscent of a classic Arab auntie. What is striking is how her character appears in the episodes away from her children, where she is revealed as complex and conflicted, like Ramy himself. "I want to look at the way that we stereotype ourselves," Youssef says.

Many of the themes in the show are universal, from the differences between generations to what it means to be a man. "How has Ramy been influenced by the way he's been treated versus the way his sister's been treated by their mother and father?" asks Youssef. "It's like he has been babied so much because he's a boy that it's prevented him from becoming a man, or even just a version of his potential."

As a practising Muslim, Ramy doesn't simply have to contend with an Islamophobic society; some of his biggest issues involve coming to terms with himself and his relationship with his faith.

"I think for every character, very much so for the Ramy character, it's 'me versus me'," he explains. "Whether it be with writers who are in our room or whether it be with people who are in my life, I try to imagine: what are they hiding?"

This approach has resulted in a show so honest that it can make for uncomfortable viewing. In series two, Ramy is getting to know a Muslim woman, and tries to be honest with her about his sexual history and tells her he thinks he has been watching too much porn. She advises him to "hide his sins", a cultural and religious value that is shared across different Muslim communities.

So how does he square that principle with making a show that lays bare the transgressions of its characters? "If anything, because this show is fiction, this is a place to explore sin," he says. "It allows there to be a reference point to talk about things, while others can continue to hide their sin."

For Youssef, this is the role of art in the community. "What should the artist be doing exactly? Showing Islam and its perfection? No, that's what the teachers, imams and the sheikhs are supposed to be doing. I'm not studied on Islam, so my job, if anything, is to show a nuanced story in which we can discuss things. It doesn't feel like a contradiction at all. If anything it feels like the purpose of the show."

The show's positive reception in the Middle East surprised Youssef. "They get that we're skipping all the entry-level conversations and trying to get into nuances about faith and ego. There's this desire where American audiences sometimes are like: 'Couldn't you just have had some whole-

▼ Nowhere to hide

Ramy is loosely based on Youssef's real New Jersey life

55



some conversations as opposed to getting into all the ego, sex and drugs - all this stuff you went right into that makes people feel uncomfortable?"

Mahershala Ali's appearance in season two, playing a wise and loving sheikh, has drawn more attention to the show. This partnership was important on a personal level too. "To me, it seems like a divine collaboration," Youssef says excitedly. Ali first thanked him for making series one. "It turned into me angling for us to meet and hang and eat," he continues. Soon Ali was on set, praying with Ramy between scenes. "You never see a religious leader on TV that isn't chock full of hypocrisies or corruption, and we get to have this guy who is full of love," he says. "It's so hard to even imagine someone else playing that role."

Off screen, Youssef has led with his faith too. When he received his Golden Globe earlier this year for lead actor in a comedy series, he thanked God in his acceptance speech, saying "Allahu Akbar", a phrase that in the western world is often associated with acts of terrorism, but simply means "God is great". He was asked later if he did so for the benefit of host and staunch atheist Ricky Gervais, whose monologue roasting Hollywood's hypocrisies and performative politics went viral. "The timing of it was funny after what Ricky said, but it was really important," Youssef says. "I told Ricky that he talked about God so much, he might be Muslim!" he laughs.

As trust in the media and lawmakers declines, much comedy has become more political. What does Youssef make of people turning to comedians such as Trevor Noah and Hasan Minhaj for their news? "To me that's a genre of comedy," he says carefully. "The truth I think comedy should be providing is emotional truth."

"Emotional truths are hard to put into words," he adds. "But you can put them into a joke. And that's what the joke is about ... I love that I can be wrong on a factual level, wrong on a political level. [But] I love that I can be right on an emotional level." And whether it's as real-life Ramy or as TV Ramy, that's what matters most.

Ramy season two is on Hulu in the US, Stan in Australia and in the UK on Amazon Prime Video's StarzPlay from 6 August

IMAN AMRANI IS A GUARDIAN MULTIMEDIA JOURNALIST

Culture
Music

THE POWER OF GOOD



AFROBEAT

Nigeria's biggest female popstar, Tiwa Savage, is using her position to tackle rape culture in her country. Can she create a new #MeToo moment?

By Tochi Louis

▲ **Not a quitter**
Tiwa Savage has stood firm in the face of sexism

LAKIN

In the quest to find a perfect spot for her router, Tiwa Savage has to disrupt her four-year-old son Jamil's TV time. He puts up a mild protest but soon moves on to another activity. "He's so understanding about the nature of my job," she says. "At least now I get to spend more time with him than usual."

Even in more normal circumstances, family life is frequently disrupted - Savage is Nigeria's biggest female pop star. After more than a decade of success, she is now wielding her influence to tackle rape culture, as her country has what she calls "a #MeToo moment".

"Rape culture is so rampant in Nigeria that you can barely escape it," she says. "You're either unfortunate enough to have experienced it first-hand, or through someone close to you."

Now 40, Savage was a teenager when she started her career after her family moved to the UK, becoming a backing singer. Being from a typical Nigerian home, Savage also studied for a degree in business administration and worked as an accountant. "Music has always been my first love," she says. "So getting a call to sing backup for Mary J Blige for a tour starting in just three days? I barely hesitated leaving accounting."

She was in the 2006 UK series of The X Factor and refocused on music, studying at Boston's

Berklee College and moving to LA to become a songwriter. "I took to songwriting because I was waiting for my time as an artist," she says. "It didn't sit well with me: writing songs, my experiences, and giving them out." Savage became aware of the Afrobeats scene back in Nigeria and returned.

The video to her 2010 debut single Kele Kele Love, where the levels of cleavage and leg are hardly racy by western pop standards, peeved many Nigerians who saw female artists owning their sexuality as unacceptable. "The audience felt I was too foreign," she says of her first live performance there. And the dearth of female artists in Afrobeats was startling. The unexpected backlash sent Savage back to the US.

She released a follow-up single, Love Me, Love Me, Love Me. The video featured Savage in revealing outfits, lying in bed with a shirtless man. It was banned by Nigeria's National Broadcasting Commission, sparking debate about the ban and Savage's defiance. But the controversy boosted her popularity and a return to Lagos.

Many female artists have bowed out due to the conditions they face as women in the Nigerian music industry. Referencing her feat as the first African female artist to sell out London's IndigO2 venue, she says: "It felt like a lone battle trying to convince people that I can fill at least 70% of it. And upon selling out, it was heartbreaking that people still doubted if I did it, which wouldn't have been the case if it were a male artist." Savage considered leaving music, but "my son remains a huge factor that wheels me back", she says, drawing an inattentive Jamil closer. "I don't want him to ever see his mother as a quitter."

Savage is now using her influence to the fight against rape culture in Nigeria, where more than 700 rape cases were reported to police between January and May 2020. Indignation is growing and survivors are sharing their experiences on social media. Savage's initiative, We Are Tired, began as a hashtag she used to express her frustration at negligence by the authorities. It trended quickly.

"Seeing people echo the same emotion made me feel I have bigger responsibility as a public figure," she says. She is financially supporting rape victims and their families with legal aid, and setting up We Are Tired as a charity.

Prominent figures in Nigeria, often criticised for their reluctance to speak out on social and political issues, have been vocal about rape. Savage says in her case "it's a personal thing, I care about humanity beyond music. It's part of our role, though not everybody thinks that."

Her forthcoming album Celia is named after her mother, "my strongest ally. When everybody discouraged her from letting me do music, she was solidly behind me." The songs will focus on "being vulnerable, being strong, being sensual, being in charge", the qualities Savage is now inspiring in so many other Nigerian women.

Dangerous Love is out now on Island Records
TOCHI LOUIS IS A JOURNALIST BASED IN NIGERIA

FICTION

KEEP THEM WARM

Room author Emma Donoghue's novel about the flu pandemic of 1918 has some eerie parallels for modern readers

By Sarah Moss

This must be the only book this year whose publication date has moved forward, and that is because it's set in a Dublin hospital during the 1918 flu pandemic. Reading it now offers an eerie version of the time travel of historical fiction; one can't stop thinking that it was written in 2018 for us to read in 2020, based on records from 1918. The novel's Dublin is certainly uncannily familiar for this year's readers, plastered with injunctions to "Stay out of public places ... See only those persons one needs to see, refrain from shaking hands. If in doubt, don't stir out." Another poster announces that "The government has the situation well in hand," and "There is no real risk except to the reckless." Meanwhile, schools and shops are closed, and those forced on to crowded trams regard each other with a volatile mix of fear and camaraderie.

A key strength in Emma Donoghue's work is narrative voice, and here it is as strong and compelling as Jack in *Room* and Lib in *The Wonder*. Like *The Wonder*, *The Pull of the Stars* is narrated by a nurse, a woman involved in the defining moments of strangers' lives, charged with both expertise and kindness, her professionalism and her femininity an unsettling combination for her era. Julia is working on a maternity fever ward, which is short-staffed because of war and contagion, caring for pregnant women with severe flu, working beyond her training because there is no one else. Patients stay long enough for Julia and the reader to learn to read their bodies and speech as more than symptoms, to recognise that class privilege is no protection from grief, that a half-starved 17-year-old doesn't "bruise easily" unless someone bruises her, that poverty and malnutrition tell their final tales in hospital beds.

Julia, whose background is not too different from her patients', is inured to social injustice, but a new doctor in the hospital, Kathleen Lynn,

never forgets to be angry. Babies born in the slums, she says, have less chance of surviving a year than men in the trenches. "Such hypocrisy, the way the authorities preach hygiene to people forced to subsist like rats in a sack." Dr Lynn was a real figure, a suffragette, nationalist and activist who fought in the Easter Rising and was arrested and imprisoned. In Donoghue's account, Lynn is tired but glamorous, especially in the eyes of Julia, whose sense of agency is limited to her home life caring for a brother with shellshock and her work on the ward.

On the first of this novel's three days, Julia is left in charge of the ward but given a "runner", a girl sent by the local convent, to help her. Bridie Sweeney is "the pale type of redhead, light blue eyes, brow almost invisible", under-fed and scarred like most of the patients. She proves uneducated but quick to learn, caring by nature and pragmatic by experience, and the friendship between the two women lifts an otherwise necessarily grim account of suffering and deprivation. Patients die because the flu is untreatable and the weakest have little strength to resist it; all Julia can do is keep them warm, nourished and hydrated and try to preserve their last vestiges of strength.

There is nothing cheerful about the situation, and so the novel depends on the voices and relationships of its three central women. They are all - as one would expect from Donoghue - complex characters with distinctive voices and lives based on thorough research, vivid in ways that only excellent writing can offer. I found this novel admirable right up to the final chapters, when it veers into a disappointing cliché. I'm trying not to spoil anything, but if you'd like a haunting and finely balanced literary novel in which the plot isn't suddenly taken over by depressing convention, stop 20 pages before the end.

SARAH MOSS IS A NOVELIST AND ACADEMIC



The Pull of the Stars
by Emma Donoghue

► **Camaraderie in crisis**
Making masks during the 1918 flu pandemic

HAMILTON HENRY DOBBIN/EPA





LIVE DURING WARTIME

MEMOIR

Chris Frantz's spiky account of life inside Talking Heads is high on internecine intrigue but leaves lingering sour notes

By Olivia Laing

▲ Bitterness

Tina Weymouth, David Byrne, Chris Frantz and Jerry Harrison at their 2002 Rock and Roll Hall of Fame induction

ALAMY

A winter afternoon, Providence, Rhode Island, 1973. Tina Weymouth and Chris Frantz are art students and madly in love. They're working on their paintings when they're interrupted by Chris's new bandmate, an awkward dropout with homemade trousers and home-cut hair by the name of David Byrne. He wants help with a song, and so Tina offers to write a section in French, tossing in as an afterthought the shouted line: "I hate people when they're not polite". Chris chips in with lyrics too, and by the end of the afternoon they have come up with Psycho Killer, the first defining masterpiece of one of the greatest rock bands of all time - though at the time they are still labouring under the hapless name of the Artistics.

Within a year, all three were living in an unregenerated loft on Chrystie Street, in the wilds of the Lower East Side. Weymouth's car battery was regularly stolen and there was no heat in the building after 5pm, but the neighbourhood was a Who's Who of the avant garde. Ornette Coleman, Lauren Hutton, William Burroughs,

John Giorno and Robert Mapplethorpe all lived on the Bowery, while the painter Robert Rauschenberg owned a former orphanage around the corner. Best of all, there were bands everywhere, from the Ramones to Angel and the Snake, fronted by a local beauty called Debbie Harry.

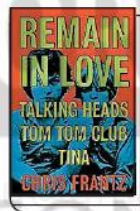
After much persuasion, Weymouth agreed to learn bass. Armed with a 1963 Fender Precision, she joined the band, now renamed Talking Heads. The next element in their explosive alchemy was not a person but a place: CBGB, an unprepossessing dive bar on Bowery that stank of dog shit and roach spray, mixed with wafts of Chanel No 5. The letters stood for Country Bluegrass Blues, the owner Hilly Kristal's preferred music, but the bar had become the sweaty centre of the emerging new wave and proto-punk scene.

Frantz spent much of that first Manhattan winter jammed in the back room, watching Television, the Ramones and Patti Smith strut their stuff, the hairs on his neck standing up when the latter first launched into Gloria. By spring he was ready. For their debut outing on CBGB's tiny stage, the trio eschewed classic rock star costume, dressing instead in what would become their trademark so-ordinary-it's-weird style. Byrne was in Levi's and Hush Puppies, a look that squared with his tense, hyper-earnest delivery as frontman. Frantz, like the preppie he was, wore a Brooks Brothers shirt for his shift as drummer. "I felt clean cut, but hip." "Yeah, they suck," he overheard Johnny Ramone say. "They'll make us look good."

Oh Talking Heads! You want to freeze them there, or maybe two years later, by which time they had acquired Jerry Harrison on guitar, a refugee from the breakup of the Modern Lovers. They didn't look like anyone else, and they didn't sound like anyone else either. Brainy art rock you could dance to, bubbling and fraying at the edges, their huge, utopian sound at odds with the alienated, bitter lyrics.

When they toured Europe with the Ramones, Dee Dee Ramone turned up at the airport walking with a cane, because his girlfriend Connie had just stabbed him in the backside. Although the cane turned out to be packed with painkillers that had to be forcibly disposed of before they could board, he was a sweetheart, who loved visiting castles. Johnny Ramone, on the other hand, hated the scenery and loathed the food. It was the spring of 1977, and all across Europe there were signs of punk's arrival.

Back in New York, they recorded Talking Heads: 77 and by 1980 had made three more albums, all produced by Brian Eno, with whom the tongue-tied Byrne had developed an intense friendship. For 1978's More Songs About Buildings and Food, they moved to the "unhurried out island ambience" of a quiet village in the Bahamas, where the legendary Chris Blackwell of Island Records had



BOOK OF THE WEEK
Remain in Love
by Chris Frantz

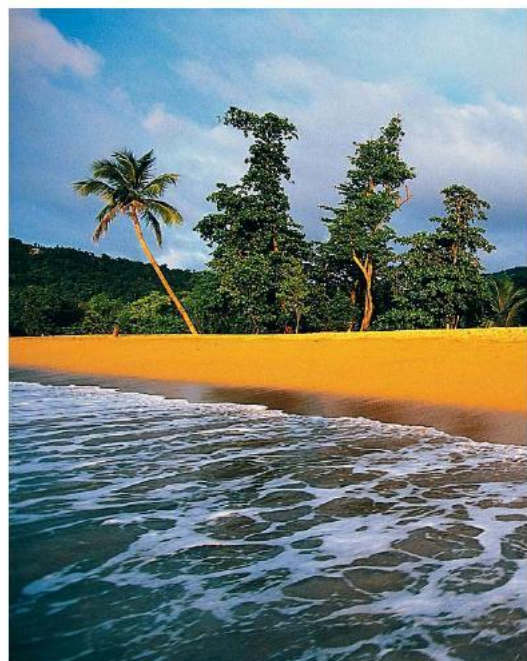
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FICTION

EYES
WIDE
SHUT

This sardonic novel has many targets, but focuses on how westerners often overlook their complicity in the rise of jihadis

By Maya Jaggi



DEAGOSTINI/GETTY

The Wondrous and Tragic Life of Ivan and Ivana is a rollicking, rumbustious and slyly mischievous Candide for our times. Set in Guadeloupe, Mali and France, and written in the wake of the Charlie Hebdo attacks in Paris, Maryse Condé's novel poses with mock solemnity as an investigative quest into how an accused jihadi named Ivan became "radicalised". Yet the scattergun satire of this scurrilous picaresque takes no prisoners.

Published in French in 2017 as Condé turned 80, and now in Richard Philcox's English translation, it marks a bold departure in an oeuvre that has roved the Atlantic triangle stealthily rewriting history. Her novels range from the epic *Segu* (1984), about a west African kingdom doubly besieged by Islam and Europe, and *I Tituba* (1986), the true story of a West Indian obeah woman caught up in the Salem witch trials in Puritan New England, to *Windward Heights* (1995), which transposes Emily Brontë to Guadeloupe, where Condé was born.

This 21st-century novel begins with the birth of the twins Ivan and Ivana in Dos d'Âne, a "godforsaken hole" in Guadeloupe. The twins' only claim to finery is the "emerald green" of the sugarcane their mother cuts. An overseas department of France, the island, one jihadist notes, is "one more place to be liberated".

The ingenuous picaro Ivan is a dropout "hoodlum" who quits a circus job in protest at the treatment of animals. Ivana, meanwhile, reads everything she can lay her hands on. On an island where 35% of people are jobless and newborns turn up in dustbins, "she was happy. She was lovely. She was top of her class." Condé pricks her Panglossian optimism: "In order to be happy on this earth we need to shut our eyes to a good many things."

The intrusive narrator tracks Ivan's radicalisation by fate's blows and life's injustices. Joining their father, a Mandingo musician in Mali, the twins find a country under curfew, invaded by Islamist gangs who ban music and trash recording studios. Recruited into the Army of Shadows, Ivan converts to Islam and has his passport stolen. He is rescued and seduced into

a ménage à trois by an expat couple whose professed colour blindness inevitably comes in for ribbing: "Black, white! What does that mean?... Colour doesn't exist." They unwittingly deliver Ivan back into the hands of the motorbiking people traffickers who robbed him.

After a series of scrapes, the twins settle in a grim Paris banlieue. Ivana enrolls at the police academy, whose canteen culture fails to dampen her sanguinity. Ivan becomes a teacher of the Qur'an to French Arab teenagers whose nominal faith has foisted an identity on them: the "mumbo-jumbo on which they placed little value made them responsible for attacks committed in unknown lands". When a friend dies in police custody, Ivan is dealt the final blows that culminate in a terrible bloodbath - and his eventual rehabilitation by the empathising writers of a book called *The Reluctant Terrorist*.

Condé spares no one. Targets range from a retired police officer ("aim for the head ... so they'll die and never come back to trouble you")

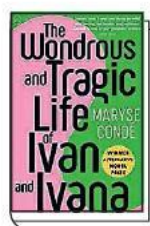
to parroted teachings ("of course the Arab sultans also practised slavery ... but their slavery was not dehumanising"). As for a world "divided into two camps: the West and their lackeys, and the rest", the novel objects: "The former claim they are victims ... In actual fact, this is not true. Both camps are playing games of massacre and each is as savage and implacable as the other."

With millions on the move ("what's the difference between being killed by bombs that drop from the sky and starving to death?"), a Somali migrant

named Ulysses would rather be pimped as a male escort than trapped in a migrant camp. That his new home is on the Rue Voltaire is one of numerous cultural references lost on the semi-educated Ivan.

Condé's provocative fun cloaks a challenge: is there not more than a little bad faith in the way the west earnestly seeks the roots of jihadi radicalism while turning a blind eye to the flagrant ills that add rocket fuel to its meretricious allure? The novel's parting shot, "you can take it or leave it", leaves the ball squarely in our court.

MAYA JAGGI IS A JOURNALIST AND CRITIC WRITING ON CULTURE



The Wondrous and Tragic Life of Ivan and Ivana

by Maryse Condé,
translated by
Richard Philcox

Steven Poole's
WORD OF THE WEEK

'Hub'



One of Boris Johnson's best new wheezes for distracting from the failings of his government is to move it somewhere else - while the Palace of Westminster is being restored - to a new "government hub" in York. **In the 16th century a "hubbe" could be what was also written as "hob"**, originally "the back of the fireplace". But then it became the name for "the central solid part of a wheel from which the spokes radiate" (OED). Not until the 19th century did "hub" acquire its figurative sense of a centre of activity. In 1858, Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote that for Bostonians, "the Boston State-House is the hub of the solar system". Around the same time, "hub" also referred to a block of wood for stopping the wheel of a train. We all hope that Johnson's new hub will not derail his administration.



The things you desire will not help you navigate your way through life

As anyone who counts a three-year-old among their acquaintances will know, there's a fiery purity to the will of a small child that's difficult to oppose. Once my son has figured out that there's ice-cream in the freezer, and decided he wants some for dessert, my role is equivalent to that of the ineffectual UN diplomat attempting to persuade a major nation-state to stockpile fewer weapons. Yet frequently, on receiving the ice-cream, he'll decide to let it melt - then forget about it completely. He wants ice cream, monomaniacally, with a force his little frame almost can't contain. But he doesn't like it so much that some other absorbing activity can't banish it from his mind.

I only clearly grasped this distinction - and realised how it applies to me, too - when I encountered the findings of a study of coffee drinkers reported on the Research Digest blog. Using various psychological tests, researchers showed that "heavy" drinkers had a much greater desire for coffee than those who consumed less of it, or none. But they took roughly the same, far lower level of pleasure as light drinkers when it actually came to drinking it. More serious addictions - to alcohol, or hard drugs - are characterised by a similar split between wanting and liking: you want the substance more and more, but like it less and less.

The ancient idea that what we desire isn't necessarily what we enjoy has received support from modern neuroscience, which indicates that the two processes involve distinct circuits in the brain; dopamine, the so-called pleasure chemical, is probably better understood as a desire chemical, which can be triggered in huge quantities in the near-total absence of pleasure.

This makes evolutionary sense, too. From your genes' point of view, it's helpful that things like sex, or eating a meal rich in sugar and fat, should be pleasurable - but what's really crucial is that they're alluring. It's much more important that you should want them, than that you enjoy them once they arrive.

Just bearing this distinction in mind, as you trundle through the day, can be surprisingly empowering: there's at least a chance you'll remember, next time you're gripped by the urge to check your phone, or have a second cocktail, that you might not enjoy it as much as you predict. It's not that desire needs to be squelched. It just needs to be understood as a not-useful guide to an enjoyable life. Wisely or not, I've also found myself surrendering to the three-year-old's demands. That way, wants arise and move through him, like a passing storm, and soon enough we're back to enjoying ourselves. It's a lot easier than trying to fight the weather.



THE WEEKLY RECIPE

By Ravneet Gill

No 85 Ricotta and orange bomboloni



Prep	15 min
Rest	30 min
Cook	15 min
Serves	4

Ingredients

2 eggs
40g caster sugar, plus extra, for coating
Grated zest of 1 orange
220g ricotta, strained overnight
110g plain flour
2 tsp baking powder
1 pinch salt
Vegetable or sunflower oil, for frying

Method

Lightly whisk the eggs in a bowl, add the sugar and orange zest, and whisk again to combine. Add the strained ricotta and stir gently to combine - don't overwork it because you want to keep some of the lumps intact.

In a second bowl, combine the flour, baking powder and salt, then add to the ricotta mixture and whisk to combine.

Scrape down the sides of the bowl, cover with a tea towel and leave to rest at room temperature for 30 minutes (or for up to two hours in the fridge).

Put a medium-sized saucepan on the hob, add enough oil to come halfway up the sides and put on a medium heat. You're ready to cook once the oil is hot enough to make a droplet of batter sizzle gently and float to the surface.

Cooking the bombolini in batches, drop small tablespoons of batter into the oil and fry for two to two and a half minutes in total, until golden - the bombolini should naturally flip by themselves after about a minute.

Use a slotted spoon to lift the cooked bombolini from the pan and transfer to a plate lined with kitchen paper. Repeat with the remaining batter. Once all the batter is used up, toss the bombolini in the extra sugar and serve. These keep for a few hours at room temperature, but, once cooled, it's best to store them in an airtight container.

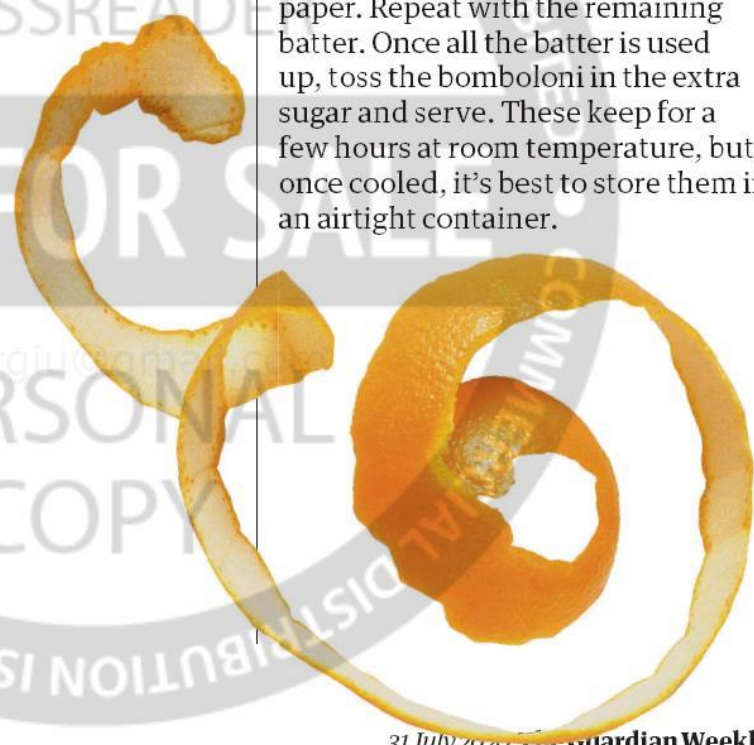
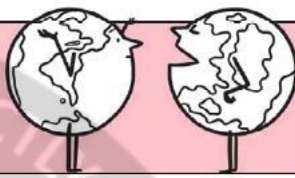


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31 July 2020 The Guardian Weekly

pressreader

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NOTES & QUERIES

Try not to get yourself caught in a tight spot, especially on an altar
What is actually between a rock and a hard place?

The horns of a dilemma.
Richard Orlando, Westmount, Quebec, Canada

● The slough of despond.
Sue Moore, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

● The decision maker in question. That's the point.
Lawrie Bradly, Surrey Hills, Victoria, Australia

● A throat, awaiting the sacrificial knife: the Latin original, *inter sacrum saxumque*, is "between the knife and the altar".
RM Fransson, Wheat Ridge, Colorado, US

The lessons of history
Is there a teacher besides experience?

Acceptance.
Charlie Bamforth, Davis, California, US

● History tries, but the whole world flunks.
Mike Dater, Portsmouth, New Hampshire, US

● Observing, listening and reading, then thinking and learning.
Edward P Wolfers, Austinmer, NSW, Australia

● Generally a depression.
Janet Chapman, Bardon, Queensland, Australia

● Yes, an open mind.
Jane Perry, Wellington, New Zealand

● Not your finger, hopefully.
John Honig, Kingsford, NSW, Australia

● An experienced teacher.
Carmel Isaacs, Sydney, Australia

● Yes, failure.
Marilyn Hamilton, Perth, Western Australia

It's time to face reality
Would you have preferred a different proboscis?

Being born with the

snub variety, I would have preferred a Barbra Streisand model.
Lizzie Wagner, Masterton, New Zealand

● After 74 years it's grown accustomed to my face.
Margaret Wilkes, Cottesloe, Western Australia

Any answers?
Which sport doesn't require a level playing field?

David Tucker, Halle, Germany

Is there no rest for the wicked?

RM Fransson, Wheat Ridge, Colorado, US

Maslanka's answers

1 For neither couple to be split the stranger must sit at either end or in the middle; the chances of this are 3/5. If the first member of the first couple from the left is with the right partner, the other couple is also unsplit. The chances of this are 1/3. So the chances neither couple is split are $3/5 \times 1/3 = 1/5$. For the 2 properly constituted couples to be kept apart by the stranger the chances are 1/15. 2 Wordpool c); 3 Jumbles INCORPORATE; 4 Same Difference BERLINER, BINLINER; 5 Dropouts CROUPIER, CHOPPIER; 6 Missing Links a) wisdom/tooth/implant; b) gold/mine/shaft; c) leg/up/lift; d) box/set/piece; e) ox/bow/man; f) rubber/band/box

COUNTRY DIARY

CLAXTON

Norfolk

It may sound strange, but I've developed a love affair with ants. They are, along with ourselves, the most successful organisms on the planet. In terms of biomass, humans and ants are roughly equal, and there are thought to be 1 million billion ants on Earth.

This month we saw our garden's first green woodpecker. In the white-gold eyes was a fierce anxiety.

Everything about this magnificent creature - the stiletto beak, the slash of crimson on her crown, even the velociraptor's eyes - was made from ants. For green woodpeckers (*Picus viridis*) feed almost exclusively on the Formicidae family, and our resident black ant colony had suddenly erupted on the lawn.

The woodpecker slashed the ground with her pickaxe bill, digging at one spot, angling the beak sideways to widen her ant-mine. Then the head pressed down, the beak jabbed deep, so that the sticky tongue could go to work.

I watched the bird, ants crawling across its back, as the long beak came out of the earth, smeared in soil. Then the woodpecker's gaze stabbed my office and caught my shadow. And the bird bounded off, yaffling. *Mark Cocker*

* Send answers to weekly.nandq@theguardian.com

CHESS

Leonard Barden

Legends of Chess, the \$150,000 online tournament where six veterans in their 40s and 50s are meeting Magnus Carlsen and three others from the current world top, got off to a surprise start last week as Israel's Boris Gelfand, 52, world No 3 in 1990, defeated China's world No 3 Ding Liren in just 16 moves.

Gelfand, who narrowly lost a world title match in 2012, is still Israel's best player. The veteran defeated Ding 3-1.

Ding has shown erratic form on the Carlsen tour,

and has lost all three Legends matches so far. One problem is that playing hours are geared to European and US players and audiences, so that the Chinese player may have to compete in the middle of the night.

3681 White to move. Black threatens a simple win by a2 and a1Q. Can you find White's only move to draw?



Another issue is internet disconnections, from which Ding famously suffered against Carlsen in the Chessable Masters. It seems likely that the Great Firewall of China blocks the tournament server and that the Chinese player uses a virtual private network (VPN), which is vulnerable to disconnections.

In another iconic moment, Vasyl Ivanchuk, 51, defeated Peter Leko with the ancient King's Gambit 1 e4 e5 2 f4, evoking "That's awesome!" from Carlsen.

3681 (by Dragoslav Djaja) 1 Nh6! If Rxa7 or a3-a2 2 Rg7+! Ke6 3 Rg6+ Ke5 4 Rg5+ Ke4 5 Rg4+ ad infinitum.

Futoshiki
Medium

Every row and column should contain 1-5. 'Greater than' or 'less than' signs indicate a number is larger or smaller than its neighbour.

Last week's solution

2	4	1	5	3
1	5	2	3	4
3	1	4	2	5
4	3	5	1	2
5	2	3	4	1

□	>	□	>	□	□	<	□
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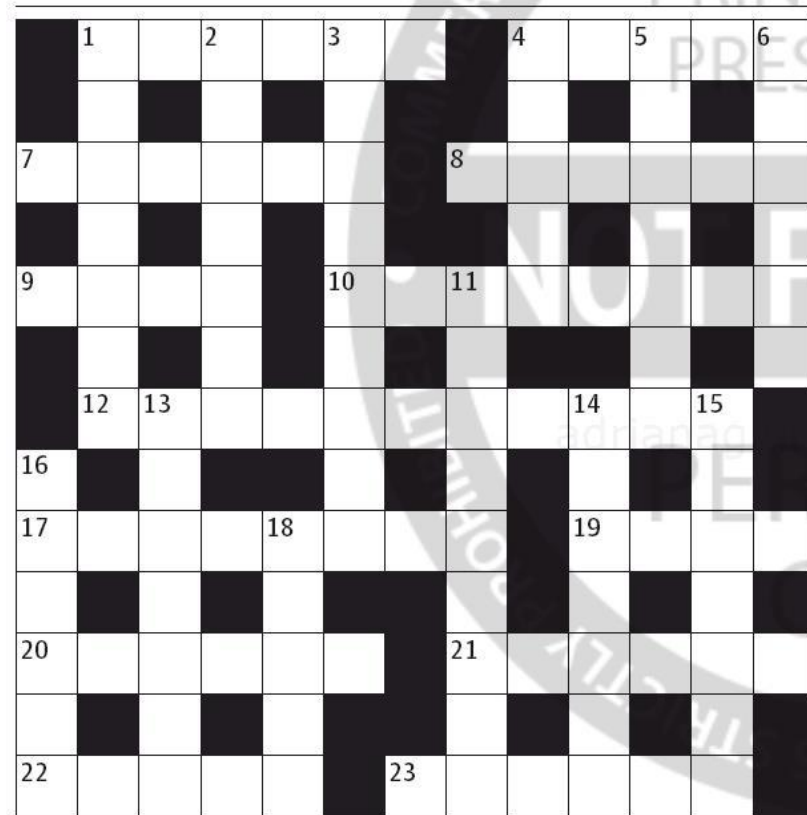
21 Hard to understand (6)
22 Choose (5)
23 Resist (6)

Down

1 Changes into something else (6)
2 Get ready (7)
3 Speeds up (9)
4 Pancakes served with sour cream (5)

18 Hardy girl acquires old place, revealing chest (7)
20 Enjoy longer life not working on river (7)
21 Protective wear, more than a couple of lines (7)
22 Top British runner keeps left (6)
25 Standard car coat (5)

Solution No 28,185

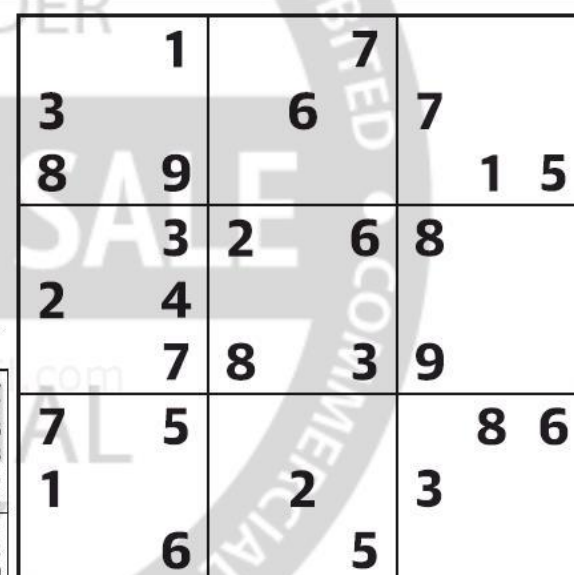


- 5 Brightly coloured neckerchief (7)
- 6 Modest - restrained (3-3)
- 11 Thrilled to bits (4-1-4)
- 13 Distinctive elegance (7)
- 14 Pain in the lower back (7)
- 15 What, say, Howard Hughes became (7)
- 16 From Liverpool? (6)
- 18 Precise (5)

B	E	C	K		S	T	A	R	T	E	R	S
A		E		B		I		A		L		C
C	A	L	C	I	U	M		V	I	L	L	A
K		L		O		E		E		I		N
D	R	O	O	P		C	A	L	I	P	H	
R				I		O				S		S
O	V	E	R	C	O	N	F	I	D	E	N	T
P		D				S		G				I
	S	U	D	O	K	U		N	Y	L	O	N
A		C		F		M		I		E	I	G
S	C	A	R	F		I	N	T	E	G	E	R
T		T		A		N		E		H		A
I	D	E	O	L	O	G	Y		S	T	A	Y

Fill in the grid so that every row, every column and every 3x3 box contains the numbers 1 to 9.

3	9	1	7	2	6	5	8	4
5	6	2	3	4	8	9	1	7
8	4	7	1	5	9	3	2	6
7	2	6	4	3	5	1	9	8
4	8	5	9	1	7	2	6	3
9	1	3	6	8	2	4	7	5
6	3	8	2	9	4	7	5	1
1	7	9	5	6	3	8	4	2
2	5	4	8	7	1	6	3	9

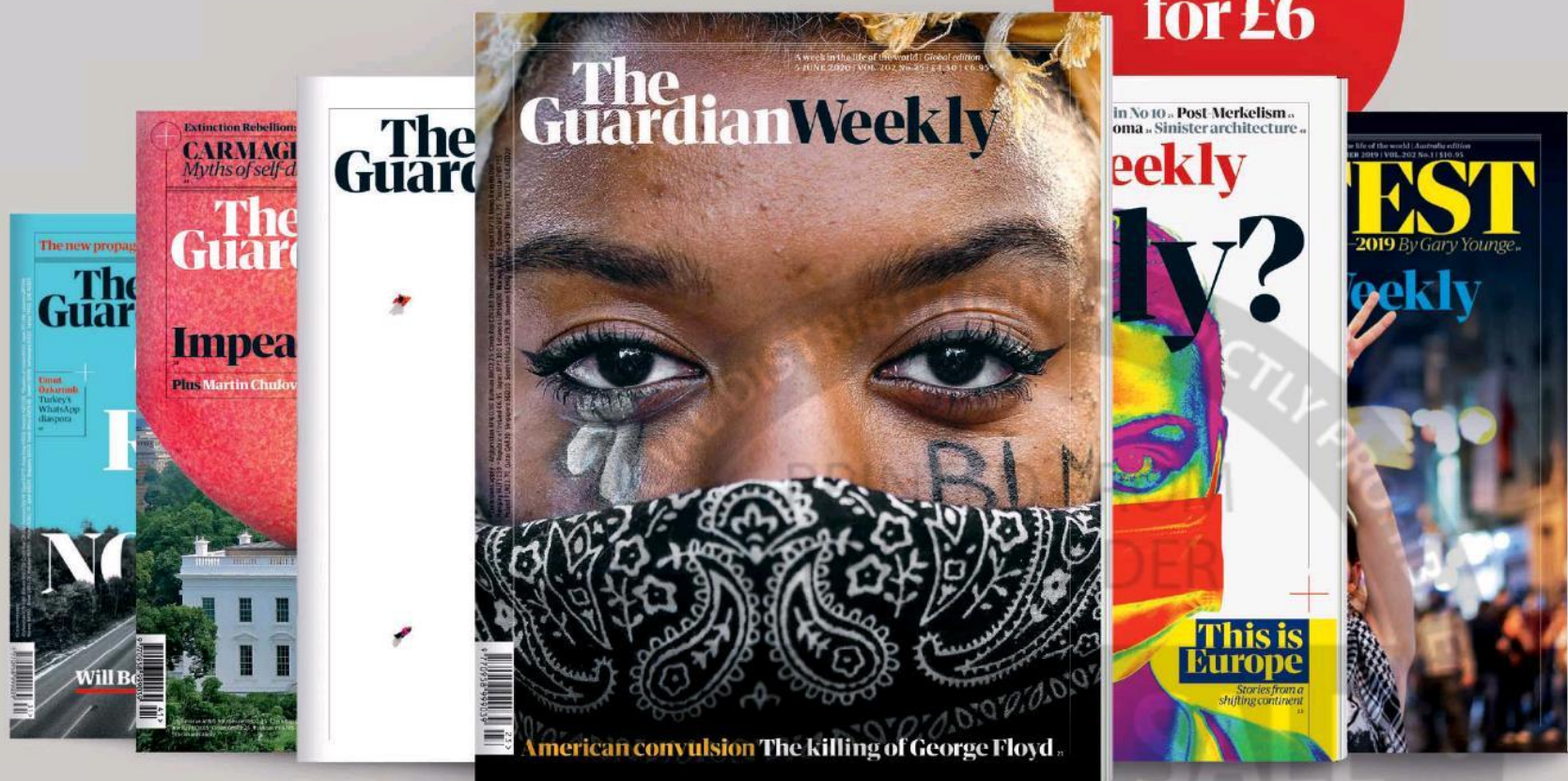


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